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THE WEEK

THE BEST OF THE U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA



Rebellion in Israel

The popular uprising that halted Netanyahu's plan to consolidate his power
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Judith Abrams
Regional Sr. Vice President

Editor's letter

The shooter blasted through the glass doors of the Covenant School with an assault rifle and stepped past the broken glass. Dressed in military camo and armed with three guns, Audrey Hale, 28, began hunting the hallways for little boys and girls, swinging the semiautomatic rifle in a circle like a soldier searching for the enemy. Like nearly all mass shooters, Hale—who apparently identified as transgender—was declaring war on a world that had been indifferent to the killer's suffering. To inflict maximum casualties, the shooter chose assault-style weapons, which rapidly fire high-velocity bullets that inflict horrific wounds. Over the past decade, nearly 60 percent of the deadliest mass shootings have been carried out with assault rifles. Not only do they run up the body count like a video game, AR-15s fulfill a mass shooter's vengeful fantasies of war in a way a simple handgun does not.

Last year, when dozens of cops arrived at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, their fear of a gunman's assault rifle kept them

from entering the classroom where he was methodically executing 19 children and two teachers. "AR. He has a battle rifle," one cop told another. Too much "firepower," another later explained. In Nashville, two heroic cops confronted and killed the shooter—too late to save two 9-year-old girls, a 9-year-old boy, and three adult staff members who lay dead of grievous bullet wounds. Their secondary cause of death was our country's fetishization of deadly weapons, which will not yield to commonsense regulation no matter how many schoolchildren or adults are slaughtered. Republican U.S. Rep. Andy Ogles, who represents parts of Nashville, sent out a Christmas card photo in 2021 in which he, his wife, and two children proudly brandished their assault rifles next to their festive tree. In response to this week's carnage, Ogles said he would send the victims' shattered families the empty consolation of his "thoughts and prayers." Only in America.

William Falk
Editor-in-chief

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Netanyahu retreats after Israelis take to the streets

What happened

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was forced to “suspend” a bitterly contested plan to overhaul the country’s judiciary this week, after a massive civil uprising that brought the nation to a standstill. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets after Netanyahu fired Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for calling for a pause in the plan, which would give Netanyahu’s right-wing government unprecedented control over the Supreme Court’s makeup and limit its authority. Tens of thousands of demonstrators waving blue-and-white Israeli flags gathered outside the parliament; schools, banks, and malls were shuttered; and Tel Aviv’s airport and main highway shut down. “This is the last chance to stop this move into a dictatorship,” said Matityahu Sperber, 68, who joined the throngs outside the Knesset, or parliament. Facing a looming strike by Israel’s largest trade union and warnings that army reservists might refuse to serve, Netanyahu said he was postponing the first phase of the overhaul “to prevent the nation from being torn apart.”

Netanyahu’s attempt to transform the judicial system has plunged Israel into one of the biggest crises in its history. The right-wing prime minister, restored to power by a close election last year, seeks to allow the Knesset to overturn Supreme Court decisions with a simple majority, limit judicial oversight of laws, and give the governing coalition—including far-right parties that want to annex the West Bank—more power over judicial appointments. Opponents say this would usher in authoritarian rule by the most extremist government in Israel’s history. Netanyahu is facing corruption charges, and if his coalition controls the courts, it’s less likely he’ll face trial or be forced to leave office.

President Biden called for Netanyahu to “walk away” from his judicial makeover. “They cannot continue down this road,” Biden said. Netanyahu responded defiantly, saying that “Israel is a sovereign country.” He called for a “real conversation” with opponents on court reform. But Itamar Ben-Gvir, head of a powerful far-right party, insisted that “the reform will pass.”

What the editorials said

Netanyahu’s “anti-democratic” overreach is an “ignominious stain” on his legacy, said the *Chicago Tribune*. A weakened court stocked with loyalists would become a rubber stamp “for the ruling right-wing coalition”—and “a get-out-of-jail card for Netanyahu.” Netanyahu is now caught between an impassioned uprising and the far-right Zionists he’s allied with to “maintain a grip on power,” and must decide what he values more: “self-preservation or the future of his nation and its democracy.”



Protesters blocking a highway in Tel Aviv

“The world’s progressive elites see a dictatorship around every conservative corner these days,” said *The Wall Street Journal*. But Netanyahu’s willingness to stand down proves he’s no authoritarian. There’s “plenty of room for negotiations” over much-needed court reforms, such as “imposing some political balance” to the left-leaning Supreme Court’s power to choose its own members. Opposition leaders say they’re ready to talk—“let’s hope they mean it.”

What the columnists said

Netanyahu learned a lot from his “bromance” with Donald Trump, said **Samuel G. Freedman** in the *Los Angeles Times*. Like Trump, he was narrowly elected in a “backlash” against secular, multicultural progressives, and allied himself with racists and religious extremists to gain power. Like Trump, he faces legal jeopardy, blames his woes on the “elite,” and “interpreted his dubious electoral mandate” as license to remake the nation’s highest court. But now genuinely patriotic Israelis who care about democracy have given the world an “example of standing up to MAGA in any language.”

The protesters who paralyzed Israel aren’t righteous, they’re “self-righteous,” said **John Podhoretz** in *Commentary*. While accusing Netanyahu of tyranny, they’re using “mob action” to challenge a democratically elected government. “The Right won” in Israel, and it’s entirely appropriate that they’re taking aim at a too-powerful court that “hews to the left.” Still, with just a three-seat majority in the Knesset, Netanyahu and his allies tried to do too much too quickly, and it proved to be a “colossal mistake.”

This affair “has exposed a new and troubling reality for the United States,” said **Thomas Friedman** in *The New York Times*. Israel is now led by “an irrational actor” who threatens not only his own nation but our “interests and values.” If Netanyahu and his cabal of “nationalist zealots” succeed in taking control of the judiciary, Israel will resemble “elected autocracies” such as Hungary and Turkey more than “the Israel the world has always known.” American supporters of Israel should no longer serve as “Netanyahu’s enablers.”

What next?

“Few believe that the crisis is over,” said **Shira Rubin** and **Steve Hendrix** in *The Washington Post*. With religious conservatives pitted against secular liberals, the power struggle has deepened “long-standing social schisms” in Israel, which analysts say “will not easily be healed.” Far-right national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir agreed to Netanyahu’s pause only in exchange for a promise he will be able to create and control a “national guard.” And even as he talks of consensus, Netanyahu has pledged to pass reform “one way or another,” and many opposition lawmakers believe he’s “acting in bad faith.” If Netanyahu were to compromise, he could alienate his “hard-line” partners and shatter his ruling coalition, said **Bill Chappell** and **Daniel Estrin** in *NPR.org*. But if the court overhaul is pushed through, the Supreme Court may move to nullify it, leaving the “two branches of government refusing to agree on what the law is.”

“Netanyahu flinched,” said **Yair Rosenberg** in *The Atlantic*. The “extraordinary explosion of civil dissent” sparked by his overreach united business leaders, labor unions, intellectuals, civil servants, and even members of the military. Now he’s backed down—but he and his allies are likely biding their time until the protests calm and they engage in “a pretense of negotiation.” Tel Aviv’s streets may have quieted for now, “but the struggle for Israel’s democracy is just beginning.”

Illustration by Howard McWilliam.
Cover photos from Getty (3)

After another mass shooting, a stalemate on gun control

What happened

President Biden this week renewed his call for Congress to ban assault weapons in the wake of a school shooting in Nashville that killed six people, including three 9-year-olds. “As a nation, we owe these families more than our prayers,” Biden said. “We owe them action.” Republicans said further changes to gun laws were a non-starter, noting that Congress already passed a bipartisan law strengthening background checks last year, after the Uvalde, Texas, school shooting. “I would say we’ve gone about as far as we can go,” said Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas), who helped negotiate that bill. The Nashville shooter, identified by police as 28-year-old Audrey Elizabeth Hale, entered the Covenant School, a private Christian elementary school, armed with an AR-15-style rifle, a handgun, and a 9-mm carbine, and roamed the halls for 15 minutes, killing three adults and three children before being killed by police. Hale, a former student at the school, had purchased the weapons—as well as four other guns—legally in recent years at five local gun stores.

Police said Hale, who was born female, had begun identifying as male on social media in recent months, using the name Aiden and he/him pronouns. Within minutes of that announcement, #TransTerrorism began trending on Twitter, and conservatives said the assailant’s gender identity played a role in the shooting. “Everyone can stop blaming guns now,” Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) tweeted. Hale’s parents said they believed their child, who was under a doctor’s care for an emotional disorder, “should not own weapons,” and added that they hadn’t known there were seven guns stashed around the house.

What the editorials said

“There is no safe place,” said the *Los Angeles Times*. For a country that “purports to care about human life,” we seem to have no problem tolerating “frequent mass casualties from guns.” Republicans won’t “buck the gun lobby” and support gun control because they think “even commonsense restrictions amount to government oppression.” Instead, we all live with the “crushing fear” that our children will be the next victims of this uniquely American scourge.



Katherine Koonce, 60; Mike Hill, 61; Cynthia Peak, 61; Evelyn Dieckhaus, 9; Hallie Scruggs, 9; [not pictured William Kinney, 9]

Blame “the widespread availability of these weapons of war,” said *The Washington Post*. The AR-15 was designed for the battlefield, with bullets that create a “blast effect” that “literally tears people apart.” Yet the association with warfare actually “became a selling point for everyday buyers,” and now 1 in 20 American adults owns at least one. “Respect for the Second Amendment doesn’t require standing by while 6-year-olds are torn to shreds.” It’s time for the country to ban the AR-15, and all the rifles like it.

What the columnists said

“The gun-grabbers” are once again mindlessly calling for a ban, said Zachary Faria in the *Washington Examiner*. But a ban on so-called assault rifles wouldn’t have prevented this tragedy, because the shooter also had a handgun—and semiautomatic handguns, “which are the vast majority of handguns,” function similarly to semi-automatic rifles. Where bans do exist, as in New York state, they are easy to circumvent: Last year, a mass shooter in Buffalo simply altered his gun to accommodate a high-capacity magazine. The solution won’t lie with guns, but with shooters.

But the only thing mass shooters have in common is their easy access to weapons, said Hayes Brown in *MSNBC.com*. This shooter was apparently trans, although we don’t yet know if that played a part in the motive. Other mass shooters, though, have been motivated by white supremacy, or by misogyny, or by paranoia, or by workplace and personal grievances. America is “awash” in guns, which is why more than 70 percent of all mass shootings in developed countries occur in the United States. So far in 2023 we’ve had 130 of them, more than one a day.

This tragedy in Tennessee lays bare the hypocrisy of Republican claims to protect children, said Michael Daly in *The Daily Beast*. In the name of “shielding kids,” Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican, has banned “inappropriate” books, banned public drag performances, and barred trans kids from the bathrooms they prefer. But the leading cause of death among children in Tennessee isn’t drag shows. It’s guns. And Lee has “done nothing at all” about that.

It wasn’t all bad

■ Storm chaser Jonny Gabel was tracking a cyclone through the Mississippi Delta when he came upon the town of Rolling Fork just after it was leveled by the powerful tornado. He got out of his car and began rescuing trapped residents, including one family miraculously unharmed in their home’s collapse. Gabel, a professional carpenter, is now building a new home for the family, donating his own time and helping pay for the rest by raising donations. The 35-year-old calls the rebuilding “the most rewarding thing I’ve ever experienced.”

■ A West African lioness that researchers have been studying for years suddenly disappeared—then was caught on camera in February with a new litter of three cubs. Florence, whom researchers affectionately call Flo, is the matriarch of the lions at Senegal’s Niokolo-Koba National Park, and one of a remaining population of West African lions estimated at 120 to 374. Habitat loss and poachers (who researchers feared had killed Flo) had driven West African lions close to extinction. But the lions are back, with the number in Niokolo-Koba park doubling in the past decade. An added bonus: Extra wildlife cameras set up to find Flo have yielded plenty of photos of the new mom and young lions.



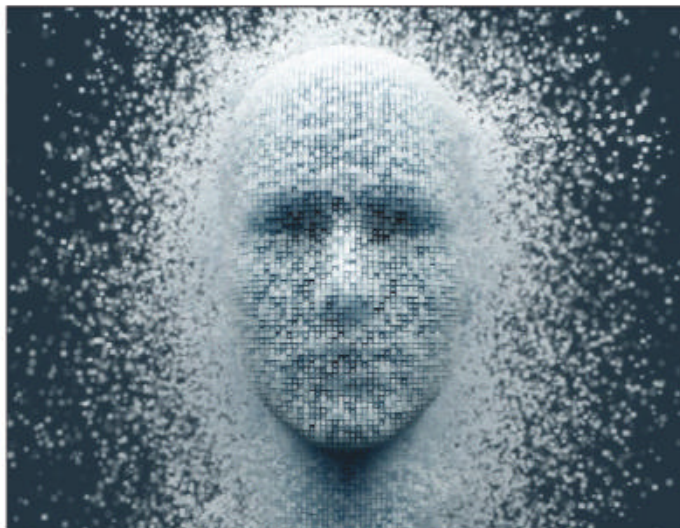
Flo, playing with her cubs

■ In a once-in-a-decade event, an asteroid the size of a skyscraper weaved between Earth and the moon last week, narrowly avoiding both. Scientists used the rare event to gain valuable intel about future interstellar threats. NASA is already gearing up to study another asteroid, which in 2029 will nearly graze Earth’s surface at just one-tenth the distance to the moon. NASA estimates that an approach that close only occurs once every few thousand years. “It’s something that almost never happens,” said NASA engineer Davide Farnocchia. “And yet, we get to witness it in our lifetime.”

AI: Is it time to ‘pump the brakes?’

Would anyone board a plane knowing that half of the engineers who built it gave it a 10 percent chance of crashing? If not, said Yuval Hariri, Tristan Harris, and Aza Raskin in *The New York Times*, why are we racing ahead with artificial intelligence? In a 2022 survey, half of 700 AI researchers surveyed put the odds of it causing “human extinction” at 10 percent or greater—and that was before the great leaps forward of Chat GPT-3.5 in November, and the even more dazzling and unsettling GPT-4 last month. In these “large language models” (LLM), “we have summoned an alien intelligence” that can digest every sentence, scientific study, image, song, and artwork that exists online and regurgitate it back to us in transmuted form. AI will soon be able to generate “political speeches, ideological manifestos, holy books for new cults,” and floods of misinformation that could erode the “foundations of our civilization.” We saw how the unchecked explosion of social media two decades ago begat an America whose “citizens can no longer agree on who won elections.” This time, before we unleash the “godlike powers” of AI, let’s agree through our governments to slow things down and “get this right.”

The powers of AI are being “greatly overstated,” said Janus Rose in *Vice*. Yes, LLMs can now produce humanlike content in pretty much any medium—albeit error-filled and necessarily derivative—but utopians and doomsayers alike are indulging in “magical thinking about the technology’s capabilities and limitations.” Impressive though it may be, AI is still “just software,” not some nascent super-intelligence that’s going to save us or destroy us on its own whim.



Even AI’s creators don’t fully understand how it works.

AI may not be able to “truly *think*,” said Eric Levitz in *New York* magazine, but part of what makes it unnerving is that it is a “black box” to its own creators, who don’t fully understand how its probabilistic algorithm creates its responses. What if we enlist some future LLM to stop global warming, and with its mindless ingenuity it “hacks into the world’s atomic arsenals” to erase mankind and unleash nuclear winter? “Pumping the brakes” on AI is both necessary and possible, said Sigal Samuel in *Vox*. We subject new medicines to years of safety trials, even as patients die waiting. We’ve managed to slow if not stop nuclear

proliferation, and have so far kept a lid on gene-editing and cloning technology. We need to hit the pause button on AI and begin adapting “to the very powerful systems we already have.”

Time is running out, said Ezra Klein in *The New York Times*. The LLMs we already have will advise you on building biological weapons, “if you ask them cleverly enough.” Their ability to converse in a convincingly human way has inspired some lonely people to give up dating and fall in love with AI chatbots. And what’s coming in just a few years will make today’s chatbots “look like toys.” Google CEO Sundar Pichai promises—or warns—AI will transform human life more profoundly “than electricity or fire.” What will that mean? AI might come up with a cure for cancer and vastly accelerate scientific and technological progress. But even the engineers who are creating it concede “they might summon demons,” and a darker, less human future. With AI’s capabilities accelerating this fast, “we do not have the luxury of moving this slowly in response.”

Only in America

■ The principal of a Christian charter school in Florida has been forced to resign after showing a photo of Michelangelo’s “David” to sixth-grade students. Officials with Tallahassee Classical School say that Hope Carrasquilla should have warned parents, in writing, that their children would be exposed to male nudity. “Parental rights trump everything else,” said school board chair Barney Bishop III.

■ A daily newspaper in Salinas, Calif., now employs zero reporters and editors. Founded in 1871, the *Salinas Californian* had 35 journalists as recently as 1999, but today only reprints articles from *USA Today* and other Gannett newspapers, with no local reporting. Gannett acknowledged “staffing challenges in certain newsrooms,” but said it was “developing strategies to support these markets.”

Good week for:

Endless winter, after several key California ski resorts in the Sierra mountains announced that this year’s record-breaking snow accumulation of about 55 feet will let them stay open into June and perhaps as late as August.

Previews, with the unveiling in Australia of a virtual-reality installation that gives users a simulated experience of dying of cardiac arrest and floating out of their bodies. If the simulation gets too intense, staff are on hand to “pull you out.”

The transformative power of art, with the announcement by Ye, the anti-Semite formerly known as Kanye West, that watching Jonah Hill’s performance in the 2012 action-comedy *21 Jump Street* “made me like Jewish people again.”

Bad week for:

Peanut butter, which was classified as a liquid by the Transportation Security Administration, meaning it can be carried onto planes only in tiny quantities. The TSA explained that like other liquids, peanut butter “has no definite shape.”

The taste of freedom, with the prompt recapture of two Virginia inmates who, after laboriously tunneling out of prison using a toothbrush, went for pancakes at an IHOP 7 miles away, where fellow diners recognized them from news reports.

The game of life, after a motorist in Minnesota who was pulled over handed cops a “Get Out of Jail Free” card from a Monopoly set. Police said the motorist deserved “points for effort,” but noted that the state “does not recognize this as a valid document.”

In other news

Federal judges adopt gift disclosure rules

Supreme Court justices and other federal judges will be required to disclose free trips, meals, and other gifts they accept from corporations or other organizations. The revised regulations were adopted in March by a committee of the Judicial Conference. Under the rules, judges will be required to disclose when they’re treated to stays at properties, such as hotels, ski resorts, and hunting lodges, and when they travel by private jet. The new language closes a loophole that provided “an enormous avenue to real mischief” meant to “influence the court,” Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) said. The late justice Antonin Scalia notably took many hunting trips with private sponsors—dying on just such a trip in 2016.

Lincoln, Neb.

Filibuster: Democratic state Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh has spent the past three weeks filibustering every bill that's come



Cavanaugh

before the state Senate to protest GOP-backed legislation that would restrict medical treatment of transgender minors. Cavanaugh has taken up all eight debate hours allowed for each bill, talking about trans rights, plus Girl Scout cookies, Omaha's doughnut scene, and the movie *Madagascar*. The bill in question would outlaw hormone treatments for trans minors. A second bill would block trans youth from using the restroom of their choice or playing high school sports with their chosen gender, and ban minors from attending drag shows. Cavanaugh said the bills would legislate "hate against children," and vowed to "burn" the legislative session "to the ground." Republican Sen. Kathleen Kauth said the hormone bill would protect minors from life-altering treatments they might later regret. "We should be allowed to debate this," she said.

Sacramento

Turning on the tap: After a winter in which a dozen atmospheric rivers dumped



Flooding in California

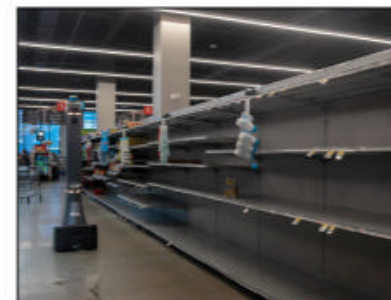
more than 2 feet of rain on much of California, Gov. Gavin Newsom this week lifted most of the 80-plus emergency drought orders. The state's largest reservoirs were at half their historical averages last spring, as more than 90 percent of the state experienced severe or extreme drought. But just 8.5 percent of California is now seeing those conditions, and major reservoirs are releasing water in anticipation of thawing snowpack. Newsom ended a requirement that cities and water agencies impose water restrictions, such as limiting the number of days residents could water lawns. With groundwater still depleted, Newsom warned that California was not completely out of its long drought, and kept in place an emergency declaration allowing the state to fast-track some water projects without long environmental impact studies.

Wilmington, Del.

Boy Scout victims' fund: A \$2.5 billion Chapter 11 bankruptcy plan for the Boy Scouts of America was upheld this week by a federal judge, allowing the organization to keep operating while it compensates tens of thousands of men who were sexually abused as children by troop leaders across the country. More than 80,000 men have filed claims, and the settlement fund will pay individual victims \$3,500 to \$2.7 million, depending on details of the abuse. The settlement, backed by 86 percent of abuse claimants and the Boy Scouts' largest insurers, was challenged by some other insurance companies, which said it sets a dangerous precedent that could result in inflated payments. Under the deal, the Boy Scouts of America will contribute less than 10 percent to the fund. Local Boy Scouts councils will contribute at least \$515 million, and the organization's two largest insurers will contribute a combined \$1.6 billion.

Philadelphia

Water worries: A burst pipe at a chemical plant caused a spill that dumped about 8,100 gallons of latex finishing material into a Delaware River tributary, causing citywide fears of contaminated tap water.

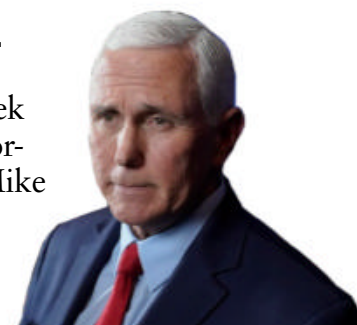


A run on bottled water

After initially issuing an alert urging residents to drink bottled water, city officials said tap water is safe to drink—but recommended storing two days' worth of tap water in jugs and pitchers in case the situation changes. "We can all confidently say the threat has passed," Mayor Jim Kenney said, downing a glass of tap water at a press conference. At least 60,000 gallons of contaminated water were collected, but testing found no evidence of contamination near the city's water system intake, or in the system itself. Chemicals spilled at the Trinseo plant included butyl acrylate, the same chemical on board the freight train that derailed last month in East Palestine, Ohio, and caused residents' concerns about health and environmental effects.

Washington, D.C.

Pence must testify: A federal judge this week reportedly ordered former Vice President Mike Pence to appear before a grand jury investigating former President Trump's efforts to overturn

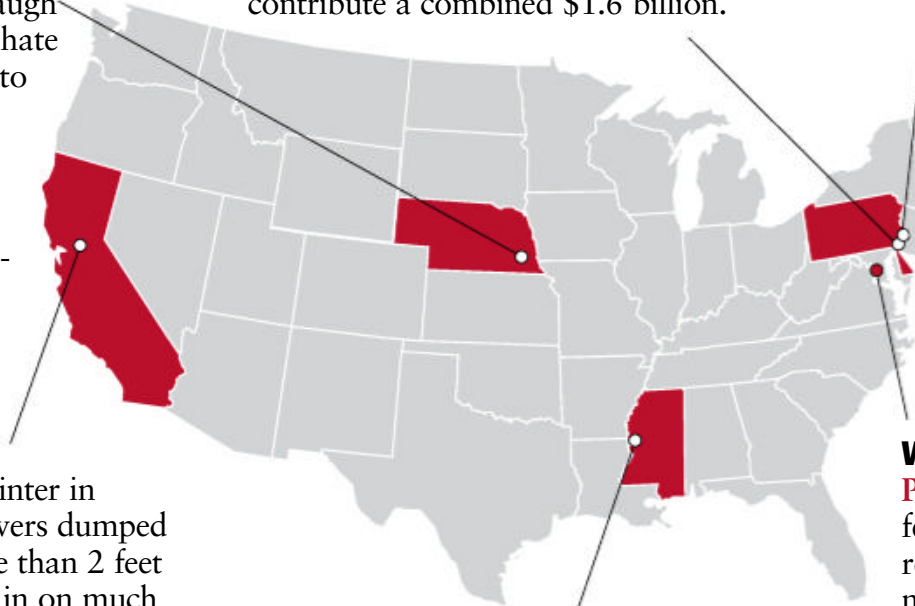


Pence

the 2020 election. The judge rejected Trump's argument that Pence should be shielded by executive privilege, and Pence's argument that, because he was acting as president of the Senate, he should be shielded by the Constitution's "speech and debate" clause. Trump, addressing thousands of supporters in Waco, Texas, for the first major rally of his 2024 presidential bid, vowed to "destroy the deep state" if elected and said the Supreme Court "didn't have the courage" to reverse his 2020 defeat. He recently warned of "death and destruction" if he's indicted by a Manhattan grand jury following a separate probe, but the panel reportedly won't hear evidence for a month because of a planned break, which would mean no decision on the case until late April.

Rolling Fork, Miss.

Flattened: Powerful storms and more than a dozen tornadoes tore through parts of Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee last week, killing at least 26 people and injuring dozens. The destruction zone was 100 miles wide, leaving homes without roofs and knocking out power for thousands. Rolling Fork, a town of fewer than 2,000 residents where at least 13 died, "is gone," Mayor Eldridge Walker said. "Devastation, as I'd looked from left to right, that's all I see," he said, adding that he and his wife waited out the storm in their bathtub. Homes and businesses were leveled; mangled cars filled the streets, as did massive, uprooted trees. The town saw estimated maximum winds of 170 mph. About 30 miles away, Silver City suffered similar damage. "It seemed like forever until that noise stopped," said Rolling Fork Vice Mayor LaDonna Sias, whose house was demolished. "You could hear people screaming from the neighborhood."





Roxham Road loophole: Closed

Ottawa

Migrant deal: On President Biden's first official visit to Canada last week, he and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced a deal allowing Ottawa to turn back asylum seekers who cross from the U.S. illegally. Last year, nearly 40,000 people from Haiti, Syria, and other countries

entered Canada that way, many of them through the Roxham Road unofficial border crossing between New York and Quebec. The influx had overwhelmed Quebec authorities and created a political headache for Trudeau. The deal modifies the 2004 Safe Third Country Agreement, closing the loophole that let those who entered the country at unofficial crossings apply for asylum; now they will be sent back to the U.S. In exchange, Canada will accept 15,000 asylum seekers from Central and South America, which Washington hopes will ease pressure at the southern U.S. border.

Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

Migrants die in fire: At least 39 people were killed this week in a fire that erupted at a migrant detention center in northern Mexico, right over the U.S. border from El Paso, Texas. Surveillance video showed a guard and an immigration official leaving the cell without helping the desperate people trapped inside as flames mount; smoke then blacked out the image. Migrants gathered outside the center demanding information. "They were left to die!" one shouted. Most of the victims were from Central America or Venezuela, part of a larger wave of arrivals seeking to reach the United States through Ciudad Juarez. The city's shelters are full of people waiting for a response to their asylum requests—or for a chance to cross the border.

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Ditching Taiwan: Honduras, long a key ally of Taiwan, severed bilateral relations this week and instead established diplomatic ties with China. Honduran Deputy Foreign Minister Antonio García said Taiwan's diplomats—who work at the second-largest embassy in the country, after the U.S. Embassy—had just 30 days to "pack up and leave." The decision to switch loyalties from Taipei to Beijing is expected to unlock billions of dollars in Chinese investment, a godsend for Honduras' low-paid workers. "China has a lot to offer in terms of energy, education, infrastructure, trade, and other areas," García said. China won't extend relations to countries that recognize Taiwan, which it sees as a renegade province, and Taiwan is now recognized by just 13, mostly tiny, countries.



Lowering the embassy flag

Port-au-Prince

U.S. supports U.N. peacekeeping mission: The Biden administration dropped its call this week for a Canada-led coalition to help Haitian police fight gangs that have taken over huge sections of the capital, Port-au-Prince, after Canadian authorities made it clear they were not interested. Instead, it is now backing another U.N. peacekeeping mission. Haiti has had eight such missions in the past 30 years, and peacekeepers have sometimes brought crime and disease, including a deadly 2010 cholera epidemic. But in a recent poll, 70 percent of Haitians said their own police would not be able to restore order without outside help. The World Food Program warns that the gangs' control of resources has pushed nearly half the population into acute hunger. "We cannot wait for the scale of the problem to be expressed in deaths before the world responds," said WFP official Jean-Martin Bauer.

Paris**Mass protests over retirement law:**

Furious demonstrations against President Emmanuel Macron's law raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 continued across France this week, bringing business to a halt and closing tourist attractions. The government, which has already been criticized for alleged police brutality, deployed some 13,000 riot troops, warning that radicals had infiltrated the demonstrations and intended "to destroy, to injure, and to kill." Demonstrators—some holding banners saying "64 NON!"—blocked roads and train tracks in Paris and other cities, and some set fires and hurled rocks at police. They are demanding that the law, passed two weeks ago, be rescinded.



Huge police presence



Harris: Teach this history.

Accra, Ghana**Harris brings aid:**

Vice President Kamala Harris sought to underscore the U.S. commitment to Africa this week during a historic three-nation tour, the first visit to the continent by America's first Black vice president. In Ghana, Harris wiped away tears as she visited Cape Coast Castle, where enslaved Africans were forced onto slave ships in the 1600s. "The horror of what happened here must always be remembered," she said in an oblique critique of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' recent blocking of a new high school AP course in African-American history. "It cannot be denied. It must be taught." Harris also announced U.S. assistance, including \$139 million for Ghana and \$100 million to help West African nations fight extremists. Her tour of Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia is part of a broader U.S. effort to counter China's growing influence on the continent.

Yefremov, Russia

Man flees after daughter taken: A Russian court this week handed down a two-year prison sentence to a single father, Alexei Moskalyov, whose daughter drew an antiwar picture in school. The case started last April, when the girl's art teacher told sixth-graders to draw a patriotic picture of Russian soldiers. Moskalyov's daughter Masha, then 12, drew a woman in front of a Ukrainian flag, shielding a child from missiles. "No to war," Masha wrote, "Glory to Ukraine." The school promptly called the police, and authorities investigated the family and found the girl's father had made antiwar posts online. They placed him under house arrest early this month on charges of "discrediting the military," and sent Masha to an orphanage. Moskalyov, 54, fled his home just before the guilty verdict was handed down; his whereabouts are unknown.

Avdiivka, Ukraine

The next Bakhmut: Russian forces this week stepped up their bombardment of Avdiivka, a Ukrainian stronghold military leaders say could become a "second Bakhmut." Russian troops have been trying to seize Bakhmut for nearly a year, yet while most of that city has been reduced to rubble, it is still in dispute. Now they are using the same tactics on Avdiivka, a town near the Russian-occupied regional capital Donetsk, pounding it with so much artillery that city official Vitaliy Barabash said it looked like a "place from post-apocalyptic movies." As in Bakhmut, the Russians have been suffering heavy casualties in their unrelenting attacks. Ukraine did get a boost this week, though: The first deliveries of the promised tanks arrived from Germany and the U.K.



Civilian buildings targeted

Hasakah, Syria

U.S., Iran clash: An Iranian-made suicide drone hit a U.S. base in Syria last week, killing a U.S. contractor and wounding six other Americans. The attack triggered the heaviest fighting between the U.S. and Iran-backed militias in the area since 2019. Two Air Force F-15E fighter jets retaliated with missile strikes that killed eight fighters linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards, and the militias responded with rockets and drones. Iran supports the Syrian government, while the U.S. has some 900 troops in Syria to help the opposition Syrian Democratic Forces combat ISIS. President Biden said the U.S. "doesn't seek conflict with Iran, but be prepared for us to act forcefully to protect our people."

Shanghai

Historic visit: Taiwan's former President Ma Ying-jeou traveled to Shanghai this week, becoming the first current or former Taiwanese leader to visit the mainland since the Chinese civil war ended more than seven decades ago. Ma said the trip was meant to ease escalating tensions between Taiwan, a self-governing democratic island, and Communist-run China, which considers Taiwan part of its territory. He called for people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to work for peace, saying, "We are all Chinese."



Ma: 'We are all Chinese.'

Under Ma's presidency, from 2008 to 2016, cross-strait relations were at their warmest; they have soured under current President Tsai Ing-wen. In a symbolic counter to Ma's visit to China, Tsai this week stopped in the U.S. on her way to Central America.

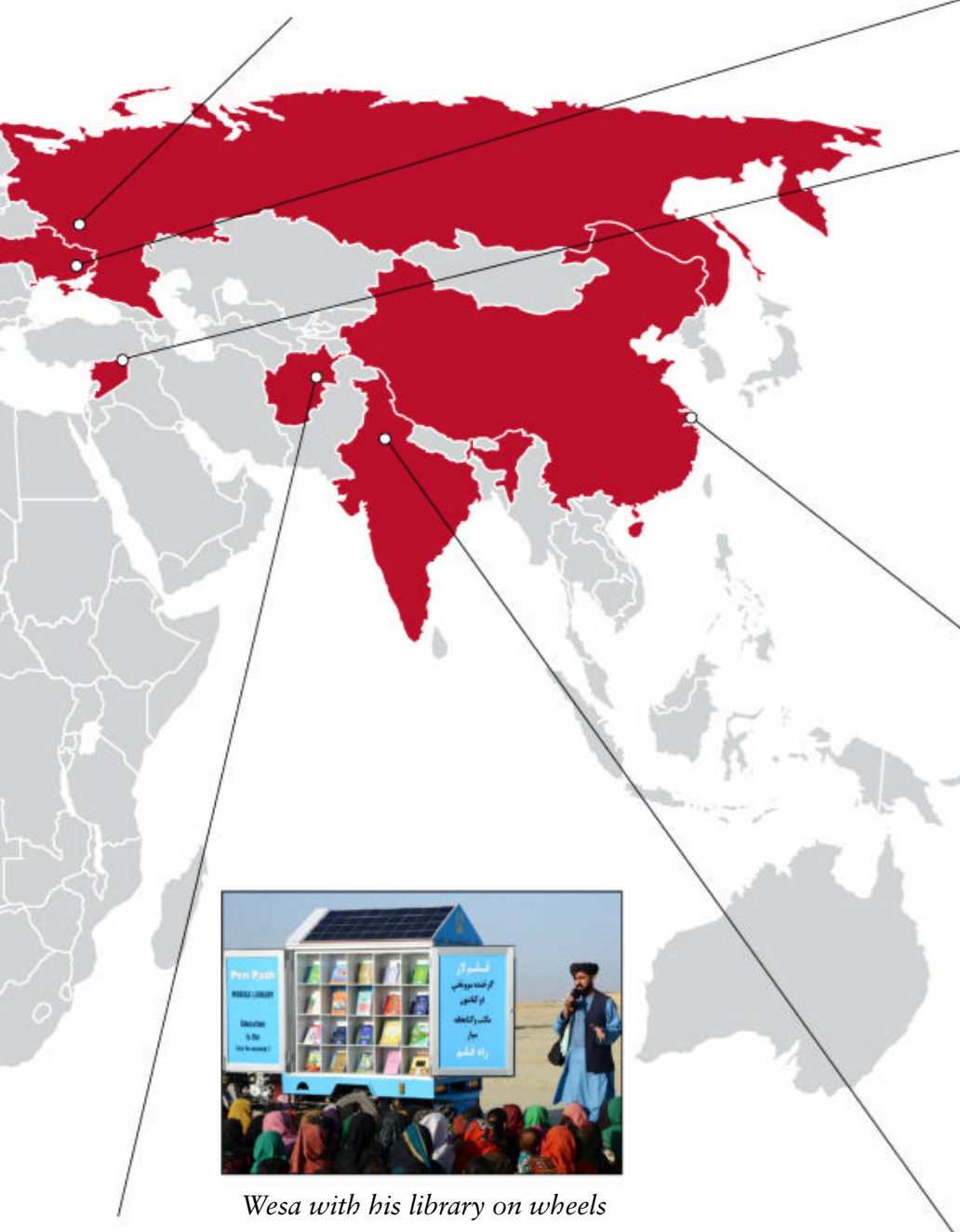
Delhi

Opposition leader jailed: An Indian court sentenced opposition leader Rahul Gandhi to two years in jail on defamation charges last week for insulting Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The allegations stemmed from a 2019 speech in which Gandhi referred to two fugitive businessmen, both with the last name Modi, and said: "How come all thieves have the name Modi?"



Gandhi: Silenced

Gandhi, a member of the powerful family that has produced three Indian prime ministers, marched more than 2,200 miles across India in recent months aiming to revive the fortunes of his once dominant Congress party. That party now holds less than 10 percent of parliament after being crushed by Modi and his increasingly authoritarian, Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in two straight elections. "I am fighting for the voice of this country," Gandhi, 52, said on Twitter. "I am ready to pay any price."



Wesa with his library on wheels

Kabul

Crackdown on education: Continuing their assault on girls' education prospects, the Taliban this week arrested Matiullah Wesa, an internationally prominent education activist. Wesa had just returned to Kabul from Brussels, where he met with European Union officials to discuss ways to bring education to all Afghan children, and the Taliban cited those meetings as the reason to detain him. Wesa, 30, is the founder of the charity Pen Path, established a decade ago to send mobile libraries into conservative rural areas and teach villagers the importance of educating their daughters. He kept up his work even after the Taliban retook control of Afghanistan last year and began rolling back the rights of girls and women. In one of his last tweets before being arrested, he said that Islamic law gives girls the right to education.

Lakshmi's years of pain



Padma Lakshmi has bottled up shame throughout her life, said Zoe Williams in *The Guardian* (U.K.). The Indian supermodel and host of TV's *Top Chef* withheld the story of being raped at age 16 and molested at age 7 until five years ago. Lakshmi, 52, was also reluctant to discuss endometriosis, a uterine disorder that causes menstrual irregularities, severe pain, and infertility. She's suffered from it since she was 13, but it went undiagnosed for 23 years. "Every month, being in bed for a week, my body turned against me," she says. Female friends would take two ibuprofen and seem fine. "I thought, 'What is wrong with me, that I cannot handle one of the most basic parts of being female?'" In the late 1990s, she began dating author Salman Rushdie. She believes endometriosis hurt their marriage, which ended in 2007. (Rushdie has called her a "bad investment.") Several years later she had a daughter with venture capitalist Adam Dell, despite having had a fallopian tube and half an ovary removed in surgery. "I really don't know how that happened," she says. She is now an advocate for other women with her condition, co-founding the Endometriosis Foundation of America. "Nobody wants to stand in front of a room and talk about their vagina," she says, "but I was so angry about what had happened to me."

Why the 'Hot Dog King' won't budge

Dan Rossi relishes his continuing battle with New York City over his hot dog stand, said Chris Crowley in *New York* magazine. For nearly 16 years, Rossi has operated a cart on Fifth Avenue outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art—a heavily trafficked area that could bring Rossi \$1,500 on a nice day. When he arrived, in 2007, a vending company was paying the city more than \$500,000 a year for exclusive rights to that coveted spot. But Rossi, citing a Civil War-era policy, argued that as a disabled veteran he's exempt from such fees and permits, and he refused to leave. "This is like the Alamo," Rossi says. "I'm the only one protecting the vets. And I'm probably the only one protecting the legitimate vendors." About a decade ago, the man once dubbed the city's "Hot Dog King" began sleeping in a folding chair and then a van parked there to protect his spot. City officials are cracking down, telling him his cart is too close to a crosswalk. A Change.org petition, demanding that Rossi be permitted to leave his cart overnight so he can sleep at home like other food cart vendors, garnered 50,000 signatures. "This is probably the last battle," he says. If the city doesn't grant his permit, "I'm gone," he says. "You can just last so long."



Why Bündchen left Brady

Gisele Bündchen insists she never gave NFL legend Tom Brady an ultimatum: her or football, said Michelle Ruiz in *Vanity Fair*. The tabloid narrative has been that after 13 years of marriage, the Brazilian supermodel got tired of putting her career on hold to take care of their kids while Brady played into his mid-40s chasing more Super Bowl rings. He retired from football last year, then unretired to play one more season; shortly afterward, he and Bündchen announced they were splitting. Bündchen, 42, is evasive about what caused the divorce, saying they grew apart as their aspirations diverged. "You have to have somebody who can meet you in the middle," she says. "You give everything you got to achieve your dream. It's heartbreaking when it doesn't end up the way you hoped for." But the belief it was football alone that drove them apart "is the craziest thing I've ever heard," she says. "I have always cheered for him, and I would continue forever." She now splits her time between Miami and Costa Rica, where she'd like to raise her kids in nature. "I have my own dreams," she says, and wants her children to see her pursue them: "You want to show them that, in life, you have to find real fulfillment, not living something that you're not."

In the news

■ Former first lady **Melania Trump** is angry over renewed attention to the hush-money payments her husband allegedly made to a porn star, and has been living in a separate area of their Mar-a-Lago estate, *People* reported last week. Melania, 52, never forgave the former president for his alleged 2006 tryst with porn star Stormy Daniels, sources said. Donald Trump met Daniels at a celebrity golf tournament less than four months after Melania gave birth to their son, Barron. Donald denies having sex with Daniels but has admitted to authorizing a \$130,000 payment to keep her quiet ahead of the 2016 election—a payoff that is the subject of a Manhattan grand jury



investigation. Melania continues to appear at Trump's side at social events at the club but "is leading her own life," with a focus on her parents and Barron and friends. She "doesn't sympathize with Donald's plight," the source said.

■ **Gwyneth Paltrow** testified last week that she was the victim, not the perpetrator, of a 2016 skiing collision at Utah's Deer Valley Resort. Terry Sanderson, a retired Army optometrist, is seeking \$300,000 in damages from the actress and wellness mogul, accusing her of crashing into him from behind on a beginner's slope, leaving him with broken ribs and a concussion. Paltrow, 50, countersued, saying Sanderson rammed into her. On the stand, Paltrow said she initially thought Sanderson was trying to sexually assault her after she felt "a body

pressing against me" and hearing "a very strange grunting noise." Asked what she suffered from the collision, Paltrow replied, "Well, we lost half a day of skiing."

■ **Actress Reese Witherspoon** and producer **Jim Toth** announced plans to divorce last week after nearly 12 years of marriage. "We have enjoyed so many wonderful years together and are moving forward with deep love, kindness, and mutual respect," the couple said in a statement. A family friend told *The Sun* (U.K.) that Toth, 52, recently experienced a "midlife crisis" and began wearing weird jewelry and "dressing like somebody half his age." They share a 10-year-old son. The friend said the couple have been growing apart since 2021, when Witherspoon and Toth sold their stake in production company Hello Sunshine for \$900 million.

Stealing Ukraine's children

Vladimir Putin has been charged with war crimes for abducting thousands of Ukrainian children. Why is he doing this?

What are the charges?

The International Criminal Court recently accused Putin and his top children's rights envoy with unlawfully seizing and moving thousands of children out of their home country. That's a violation of multiple U.N. human rights conventions. Of the thousands of war crimes linked to the Russian president, this is one of the easiest to substantiate. Ukrainian children ranging from infants to 17-year-olds are known to have been deported to Russia or Russian-occupied territory, most of them without their parents. Human rights officials and Ukraine's government say the number of minors taken is at least 16,000 and may be as high as 400,000. Russian propaganda portrays the abductions as humanitarian "evacuations" to get children out of harm's way in besieged Ukraine. But Ukraine and human rights organizations say the children have suffered physical and sexual abuse, the severing of family ties, and indoctrination in pro-Russia "re-education" camps. "They change their citizenship, give them up for adoption under guardianship, commit sexual violence, and other crimes," said Ukraine's Children's Rights Commissioner Daria Herasymchuk. "It's an act of genocide."



Ukrainian children at a Russian 'camp'

How do the kidnappings take place?

Russian forces have used a variety of tactics. As far back as 2014, Russian-backed separatists in Luhansk stopped groups of dozens of children at checkpoints, took them away from parents and adults, and funneled them across the border. During the war, children have been separated from their parents through phony "evacuation orders" and in filtration camps. Russian troops have also scooped up children from schools, hospitals, and orphanages. Orphanages in pre-war Ukraine held more than 105,000 children—more than in any other European country except Russia—but 90 percent of those children had living relatives. In some cases, Russian-backed puppet governments in occupied territory took over the orphanages and arranged for the rapid transfer of children into Russia.

What happens to them?

Some are swiftly put up for adoption, with Russia offering its citizens between \$300 and \$2,000 in state aid per child. The government has staged photo-ops in which dazed children are welcomed with teddy bears, gift baskets, and hugs from strangers. Under a decree signed by Putin last May, they're then fast-tracked for Russian citizenship. At least 6,000 children have landed in at least 43 re-education camps. Desperate to get their children away from the shelling, some Ukrainian parents in occupied territory agreed to send them away for short stays at what were depicted as rehabilitative summer camps, only to have the children held hostage. They have been shuttled to

camps as far away as the Pacific coast—closer to Alaska than Ukraine.

What's known about the camps?

Their purpose is to erase all remnants of the children's Ukrainian identity and turn them into patriotic Russians. Inessa Vertash of Beryslav in occupied Kherson Oblast reluctantly let her 15-year-old son, Vitaliy, attend a Russian camp at the urging of his school's headmistress. After two relatively pleasant weeks, he was moved to another camp that, he said in a rare phone call home, was "like a prison."

Attendees were beaten for refusing to sing the Russian national anthem, sexually abused, and psychologically manipulated. "They told the children: Your parents have left Ukraine and are never coming for you," Vertash said.

What is Russia's goal?

Ethnic cleansing. Putin wrote an infamous essay in July 2021 arguing that Ukrainian nationhood was a 20th-century fabrication, and that Ukrainians and Russians are "one people"—all of whom are Russian, whether they admit it or not. He later used this ideology to justify the invasion and attempted takeover of Ukraine. The kidnappings appear to be an attempt to replenish a dwindling Russian population, depleted by a low birth rate, aging, extensive emigration, and the carnage of the war. This meets the U.N.'s 1948 definition of genocide, which in addition to mass killings includes "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" and "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

Can the children be saved?

About 320 have been returned so far, and the Ukrainian government has asked foreign governments and international organizations for help in retrieving more. But Putin last month said he plans to expand, not abandon, the "Happy Childhood" program in coming months, and Russia makes it as difficult as possible for parents to recover their children. In some cases, it has barred anyone but a child's legal parent from picking up a child in Russia. Since Ukraine currently bars adult men under 60 from leaving the country, that often means only the mother can make the dangerous, prohibitively expensive journey into Russia via a third country to pick up her children. Olga Lopatkina managed to recover six of her nine children from occupied Donetsk after months of effort and negotiations. The children had been told to forget her. "Doesn't Russia have its own kids?" she said. "I have no idea why they need ours. I guess it's just to hurt us."

Putin's cuddly child-snatcher

In addition to Putin, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's commissioner for children's rights. The 38-year-old wife of a Russian Orthodox priest, Lvova-Belova has proved adept at putting a sweet, motherly face to the government's policy of abduction. She claims to have hugged more than a thousand children and has personally accompanied "evacuations" of youngsters from occupied Ukraine, which often end in well-publicized handovers to adoptive families. Russians, she has said, are uniquely equipped to provide "shelter" and "warm them with care and love." In addition to Lvova-Belova's five biological children, her family includes 18 adoptees. One of them, 15-year-old Filip, was brought over from Mariupol last spring. "I realized that I couldn't live without this child," she said. At first the teen was vocally pro-Ukrainian. But by the time he became a Russian citizen last September, Lvova-Belova claims, he'd learned to be thankful for "his great Russian family."

For seniors, Covid is still a real threat

Yasmin Tayag
The Atlantic

Covid may no longer pose a serious threat to most of us, said Yasmin Tayag, but “older people are still in a precarious position.” The immune systems of people 65 and over are weaker, and older people are more likely to have chronic illnesses that leave them vulnerable to severe Covid. Vaccination substantially reduces their risk, but a recent study found seniors’ risk of death tripled a year afterward if they didn’t receive boosters. Even booster protection fades in months. As a result, “older adults continue to face real threats from the illness” every time they go to the store, attend family gatherings, and interact closely with other people. More than 2,000 people are still dying from Covid every week, and most of them are seniors; Americans 65 and up are currently hospitalized at 11 times the rate of adults under 50. Older people are also more likely to get long Covid. Meanwhile, the country “has dropped all Covid precautions” and gives little or no thought to the serious risk seniors face. Their continued high death toll is shrugged off with “blithe acceptance.” For millions of older people, “life has become more dangerous—and in many ways worse—than it was before Covid.”

Xi and Putin’s ‘democracies’

Josh Rogin
The Washington Post

“Who do they think they are fooling?” asked Josh Rogin. When Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin met in Moscow last week, Putin congratulated Xi on being elected to his unprecedented third term, while Xi said he was sure Putin would win reelection next year. For these autocrats to “pretend to be winners in democratic competitions” is absurd—but their “playacting” isn’t harmless. Not only do they use sham elections to claim popular mandates for autocratic rule, suppression of free speech, and imprisoning any opposition, they are attempting “to redefine the world’s understanding of what ‘democracy’ means.” In Xi and Putin’s “proposed new world order,” actual democracies are portrayed as weak and divided, and critical democratic principles such as human rights and the rule of law are dismissed as hypocritical poses. Leaders who hold on to power through “brute force” are strong and nationalistic. This distortion of democracy has a strong appeal for other autocrats and would-be autocrats in the Global South—and even to far-right nationalists in the U.S. The West cannot allow democracy to be defined “by those who oppose it.” The stakes are high, “and real democracies must push back.”

Peer influence and the surge in trans teens

Rich Lowry
National Review

Social contagion is real, said Rich Lowry, and it’s making “teenage girls depressed, anxious, and ‘trans.’” The number of teens who want to change genders is soaring, amid strong evidence that this phenomenon is being driven by the suggestible nature of that age group, and by “the constant discussion and celebration of transgenderism” in peer groups, schools, and on TikTok and YouTube. To deny that peer influence is a major factor in the sudden increase of gender dysphoria, says Marci Bowers, president of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, “is just not recognizing human behavior.” For years, gender-dysphoric boys outnumbered girls by 2 to 1. Suddenly, there are three times more dysphoric girls than boys. Teen girls “are particularly sensitive to peer pressure,” and in some cases, entire friend groups of girls have decided they are trans. Why do progressive states have far higher percentages of gender-dysphoric kids than conservative ones? Social contagion. As that troubling reality has become clear, even progressive Sweden is warning that so-called gender-affirming care should be used only in “exceptional cases.” Years from now, “we are going to look back and wonder how we failed young girls so badly.”

Viewpoint

“‘Woke’ isn’t hard to define at all. In its most focused sense, it is the belief that America’s social and political institutions are engines of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of persecution. More broadly, it is the illiberal insistence that group identity and grievances trump freedom of thought and honest debate. In the woke zeitgeist, anyone who prioritizes traditional liberal values, such as merit or color blindness, over ‘equity’—i.e., proportionately equal outcomes for every group, regardless of credentials, experience, or performance—is part of the oppressive hierarchy that needs to be demolished.”

Jeff Jacoby in *The Boston Globe*

It must be true... I read it in the tabloids

■ A Georgia woman caused a stir by writing a barbed obituary remembering her father as a “hard as nails, redneck SOB.” Kenne Puhlar Jr., who died of sepsis at 62, “finally found something meaner and more stubborn than himself,” wrote Halliea Milner. Her tribute said her dad had married four times—“that we know of”—loved to drink, fish, and hunt, and was “a halfway decent carpenter if you could convince him to show up and work, which most people weren’t capable of accomplishing.” Still, she wrote, his “terrorized and traumatized” family “loved him till the end.”



■ A Virginia man who was hired to cart away and destroy 42 giant presidential busts from the now-defunct Presidents Park decided to keep them and will now display them. “How can you destroy these things?” said Howard Hankins, a concrete recycler. “It’s almost like they’re alive.” Hankins has kept the cracked and weather-beaten statues on his 400-acre farm, where he plans to display them in what he calls The Ruines at Hankins Folly starting next month.

■ Residents of Los Angeles’ hip Highland Park neighborhood have been inundated with fast-food deliveries from Uber Eats that they didn’t order. Some residents have gotten dozens of orders, mostly from McDonald’s and Starbucks, and have no idea who’s sending them. “We were joking: It must be Elon Musk,” said one resident. “I don’t know who else could afford it.” As orders continue to arrive, amusement has given way to “varying degrees of annoyance,” said another resident.

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ITALY

No recognition for unorthodox families

Claudia Brunetto
La Repubblica

“With the stroke of a pen,” Italy’s far-right government has wiped out the rights of same-sex parents, said Claudia Brunetto. These rights were few to begin with: Gay people here are still denied permission to marry or adopt. But same-sex Italian couples sometimes go abroad to have children via surrogacy, and certain cities, including Milan, had been allowing such couples to put both parents’ names on birth registrations. Two weeks ago, the Interior Ministry commanded the city to stop. The new policy fits with the social conservatism of far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who has railed against “the LGBTQ lobby” and “gender

ideology.” Her government is mounting “an attack on the entire LGBTQ community,” and it’s children who will suffer most. Families who managed to obtain birth registrations “by a hair’s breadth fear that they could be challenged.” Those who haven’t been able to register live with anxiety—what if the registered parent is away and the child gets into an accident? Will the other parent be refused entry to the hospital room? If the registered parent dies, will the child be taken away from the surviving one? “A simple signature at the bottom of a document can change the lives of many parents—and, especially, their children.”

SLOVAKIA

The legacy of the Candle Demonstration

Frantisek Miklosko
Denník N

Slovaks once led Europe in the fight for freedom, said Frantisek Miklosko, so why are we now siding with the oppressor? Thirty-five years ago this week, I helped lead Bratislava’s Candle Demonstration, a protest by Catholic activists against the Communist government that denied us religious freedom. We held candles in Hviezdoslav Square, and the whole world watched as authorities sent police to attack us with batons, dogs, and water cannons. Our nonviolent protest set the stage for the following year’s Velvet Revolution, which toppled Czechoslovakia’s Communist regime and helped bring about the fall of the Soviet Union itself. Today, “we can see that the bravery of those

citizens” who gathered in 1988 “carried a prophetic message for the future.” We must stand up whenever we see injustice—as we see it now in the war currently raging in neighboring Ukraine. The brutality there is monstrous: Russia is “killing civilians, kidnapping children, razing villages to the ground.” It should be obvious that Slovaks should stand with Ukraine, not Russia. Yet opinion polls ahead of next September’s elections show a plurality of Slovaks rallying to the pro-Russian Smer-SD party. It’s time once again for Slovaks of faith to speak out for what is right. It’s up to us to defend “humanity and decency, in this country” and throughout Europe.

Belarus: Putin claims he’ll station nukes in Europe

Belarus is finally getting its nuclear deterrent back, said Yuri Shevtsov in *Alfaradio.by* (Belarus). We had 81 nuclear missiles stationed here when we were part of the Soviet Union, but we returned them to Moscow after the USSR dissolved in 1991. Now Russian President Vladimir Putin says he has reached an agreement with President Alexander Lukashenko to re-deploy tactical nuclear weapons here. That would put Russian warheads on the borders with Poland and the Baltics, as well as Ukraine—closer to major European capitals. But more important for us, it would be “a significant security guarantee,” reinforcing that Belarusans are covered by Russia’s nuclear umbrella. After all, the U.S. already stations its own nuclear weapons in various European countries near us, even ones that are not officially nuclear states and should not be allowed access to nuclear weapons. In the event of war, those Europeans would have quick access to American nukes. Russia and Belarus are now simply “copying the American model.”

That’s not quite true, said Anika Freier and Christina Hebel in *Der Spiegel* (Germany). The U.S. deployed nukes to its European allies before the 1970 ratification of the Nonproliferation Treaty, so their presence is technically not in violation of that pact. If Russia now transfers nukes to Belarus, though, that *will* be a violation. Still, it won’t make much difference strategically. Russia can already “reach almost any target on Earth” with its nuclear arsenal. Putin’s announcement is merely intended to remind the West that he is capable of dropping a nuclear bomb on Ukraine



Lukashenko and Putin: Unequal allies

anytime he wants. We knew this was coming, said *Defense Express* (Ukraine) in an editorial. Belarus changed its constitution to allow the possession of nuclear weapons back in February 2022, just days after Russia invaded our land, and a few months later adapted its bombers to carry them. So while Putin, “the leader of the Rashists,” or Russian fascists, probably expected his announcement to cause us alarm, we’re not scared. Speak for yourself, said Agne Cerniauskaite in *Lrytas* (Lithuania). Lithuanians, who have given sanctuary to Belarusian opposition leaders, understand that “this is a malicious move aimed at increasing tension and causing anxiety.” State media in Belarus have already directly threatened us, saying that once Minsk controls nukes, “Warsaw will melt, and Vilnius will sink.”

“Like a lot of what Vladimir Putin says about nuclear weapons,” the suggestion that Russia will give nukes to Belarus “may add up to less than it appears,” said Julian Borger in *The Guardian* (U.K.). He doesn’t want to actually move weapons—he gets no military benefit from doing so—but merely hopes to highlight American hypocrisy. Why should the U.S. get to station nukes with its allies while Russia can’t? Even to Western arms-control experts, the U.S.’s claim that its nuclear weapons in Europe are still under its control, and therefore don’t amount to a nonproliferation violation, does seem like “a cynical dodge.” Ironically, the U.S. was actually considering removing its missiles from Europe before Russia invaded Crimea in 2014. So if Europe is now bristling with nukes, “Putin has in large part himself to blame.”

India: The hunt for a Sikh separatist leader

Authorities in Punjab state upended life for millions of people in their quest to arrest the “radical preacher” Amritpal Singh, said Navjeevan Gopal in *The Indian Express*. The Sikh separatist leader—who wants to create a homeland called Khalistan in Punjab, where most of the religious minority Sikhs live—is accused of leading an armed militia and having links to Pakistan’s spy agency. In February, his radical followers violently overran a police station, and authorities put out a warrant for his arrest. When Singh went on the lam last week, state authorities actually cut internet and text messaging to all 27 million people in Punjab for days, out of fear that he would use WhatsApp to organize his escape. They mobilized literally thousands of police to search for him—but it didn’t work. He’s now reportedly gone abroad, “hiding in Nepal.”



Amritpal Singh is on the loose.

Singh became “the new poster boy of radical Sikh politics” almost overnight, said Vivek Gupta in *The Wire*. Until last year, the 30-year-old self-styled preacher was just a truck driver living in Dubai who posted Sikh themes on social media. When the Sikh separatist group Waris Punjab De lost its founder in a car accident, Singh claimed the mantle of leader from abroad. Last September, when he returned to India to take the turban, he began emulating the late founder of Sikh separatism, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. That’s alarming, given Bhindranwale’s legacy of violence: After the Indian army killed him in 1984, then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who had authorized the mission,

was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards, and in the sectarian riots that followed, Hindus killed thousands of Sikhs. Many are “baffled” at how this uneducated young man could rise from nowhere and pass himself off as heir to Bhindranwale. Some Indians see “a conspiracy,” said Kapil Komireddi in *The Sunday Times* (U.K.). They think Singh might actually be a “stooge” of the ruling Hindu nationalist BJP party. After all, “his transformation from a provincial rabble-rouser into an international celebrity” has been fueled by the over-

whelmingly Hindu-nationalist press. And his seemingly miraculous stunt of evading thousands of officers has embarrassed the Punjab government, which is governed by the BJP’s rivals.

In any case, he’s dangerous, said *The Hindu* in an editorial. His most fervent followers are in the Sikh diaspora, which has a history of violence and radicalism—witness the 1985 bombing of an Air India flight by Canadian Sikhs. That attack killed 329 people, making it Canada’s deadliest act of terrorism. More recently, in the past six years there have been more than 20 killings worldwide linked to Sikh separatists. Singh himself is drawing support from Sikhs in Canada, the U.S., the U.K., and elsewhere. They have attacked Indian embassies and consulates in his name, raising the Khalistan flag at the consulate in San Francisco, for example, and breaking windows in London. India must clamp down on this Sikh separatism, both at home and abroad. “A wound that is allowed to fester will sicken the whole body.”

AUSTRALIA

Why are we following the crazy U.S.?

Geraldine Brooks
The Sydney Morning Herald

Australia has hitched its military policy to America’s at “the worst possible time,” said Geraldine Brooks. America is at risk of “slipping into autocracy,” with a huge sector of its electorate “untethered from the reach of truth.” Yet last month Australia agreed—as a member of the AUKUS defense group of Australia, the U.K., and the U.S.—to start stationing AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines at a base near Perth from 2027 on, the better to counter threats from China. We are now effectively bound to follow the U.S. military lead in the Pacific. And where will the Americans take us? The next commander in chief could well be

another “erratic, uninformed, ego-driven” president in the vein of Donald Trump, or even Trump himself. In all major world conflicts since World War I, we’ve “jumped into every foxhole the U.S. has chosen to dig.” That loyalty has had “dire consequences,” both for our soldiers killed and wounded abroad and for “social cohesion at home.” The next conflict America drags us into could be far more cataclysmic than Iraq or Vietnam. The U.S. is a divided nation, and it simply can’t be a stable partner in defense and foreign policy. “Let America keep its attack subs and its attack politics. Right now, we are a lot safer on our own.”

JAPAN

Why women don’t want to have kids

Editorial
The Japan Times

It’s no wonder Japanese women don’t want to have babies, said *The Japan Times*. Our society is doing almost nothing to help them. We desperately need more children. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida recently warned that the country is “on the brink of not being able to maintain social functions” because of our unsustainably low birth rate. Already, nearly 30 percent of the population is age 65 or over, and we have just 1.8 workers per retiree—the lowest ratio in the world. We need women to do two things: have more babies and join the workforce. But Japanese women say the societal expectation that they will be doting wives and mothers

while also taking care of both spouses’ elderly relatives is too great a burden. To do all that alone is unfulfilling, and to do it while also holding down a job is impossible. If Japan is to defuse its demographic time bomb, it will have to empower women, by offering greater equality in the workplace and better child-care options. Kishida says he wants to do that, but he hasn’t set a very good example. In his own government, he’s given just five of the 40-some cabinet posts to women—“even his minister for women’s empowerment is a man.” The country needs to “change Japanese thinking about the role of women in society,” and quickly.

Noted

■ An estimated 238,500 American children have lost a parent or primary caregiver to Covid, according to calculations by the Imperial College London. Globally, there are more than 8 million such “Covid orphans.”

CNN.com

■ New York City has converted about 100 hotels and other facilities into housing for 50,000 migrants who’ve been bussed to the city from the southern border. They include tourist hotels in midtown Manhattan that now solely house migrant families. Mayor Eric Adams says housing the migrants could cost \$4 billion over the next two years and could lead to cuts in city services.

The New York Times



■ About 16 million Americans—or 1 in 20 adults—own at least one AR-15 assault rifle. Two-thirds of those in existence have been manufactured since the Sandy Hook mass shooting and generated \$11 billion in sales. Ten of the 17 deadliest shootings in the country since 2012 have involved AR-15s.

The Washington Post

■ The identities of the jurors in the upcoming defamation trial involving E. Jean Carroll’s rape accusation against Donald Trump will be kept fully hidden from the public, the presiding judge has decided—a safety measure usually limited to trials involving mobsters and drug kingpins. U.S. District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan wrote last week that the jurors faced “significant risk” of “harassment or worse” by Trump supporters.

The Daily Beast

DeSantis: Why his backers are getting worried

“Is Ron DeSantis not yet ready for prime time?” asked Matt Lewis in *The Daily Beast*. Many Republicans thought the Florida governor had the best shot at wresting the 2024 GOP presidential nomination away from Donald Trump, but “his performance over the last couple of weeks has not instilled confidence.” He flip-flopped on

“everything from cutting entitlement programs to his support of Ukraine.” In an interview with Piers Morgan, DeSantis lacked “charisma and confidence,” relied on scripted “talking points,” and had a forced, “creepy” laugh. DeSantis looked deeply uncomfortable when asked about Trump’s belittling nicknames and vicious smears of him as “a groomer,” and seemed “out of his league.” In recent weeks, national polls show Trump’s lead over DeSantis widening to 14 points, said Dasha Burns in *NBCNews.com*. Some GOP donors fear that DeSantis will continue to wilt under Trump’s relentless assault and the bright national spotlight, and are suggesting he wait until 2028. DeSantis “may be missing his moment.”

“DeSantis has never been tested,” said Jennifer Rubin in *The Washington Post*, “and it shows.” He became a rising right-wing star by passing attention-grabbing culture war bills with a



Now facing ‘an even bigger bully’

“tepidly defend” Trump by accusing the Manhattan prosecutor of bias. “Like a boxer who has never had an adequate sparring partner,” DeSantis seems “utterly unprepared” for this fight with “an even bigger bully.”

DeSantis is “trapped,” said Chris Stirewalt in *The Dispatch*. He has to start making the case that Trump is unfit, but “anti-anti-Trump” impulses have grown so powerful among Republicans that attacking Trump risks making DeSantis sound like a Democrat. DeSantis can’t win “a scorched-earth war with Trump anyway,” said Alex Shephard in *The New Republic*. Positioning himself as a sane, more disciplined version of Trump “isn’t going to cut it,” either: Ask Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Scott Walker how that worked out in 2016. It’s still early, but “DeSantis just looks lost. It’s the same look we’ve seen on countless Republican faces over the past eight years.”

Child labor: Making it easier for teens to work

“Are we actually arguing about whether 14-year-olds should work in meatpacking plants?” asked Terri Gerstein in *The New York Times*. Last month, Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed a bill eliminating a requirement for 14- and 15-year-olds to have a state work permit to get a job. The move is part of a broader push to loosen child labor laws by conservative state legislatures. The Iowa legislature is considering a bill that would allow 14-year-olds to work in industrial freezers and meat coolers and 15-year-olds to work on assembly lines moving items that weigh up to 50 pounds. In Ohio, there’s a push to allow 14- and 15-year-olds to work until 9 p.m. during the school year—in violation of federal law—while the Minnesota legislature is debating letting the construction industry recruit 16- and 17-year-olds. We’re not talking about teenagers babysitting or folding sweaters at the mall. We’re talking about them working in dangerous plants and factories, like in the 19th century. “It’s outrageous that we are even discussing it.”

Liberals are “freaking out,” said the *Washington Examiner* in an editorial, but Arkansas should actually “be a model for national child labor policy.” Sanders is just making it easier for teens

to work and earn money. Many teens could benefit from, say, working a part-time job at Walmart for \$14 an hour, especially if they’re saving for college, and “parents know better than bureaucrats what is best for their children.” With the current labor shortage, employers can benefit, too. Besides, kids “spend too much time on social media and too little growing up,” so “anything reasonable that a state can do to make it easier for them to work is welcome.”

If employers need more workers, said Helaine Olen in *The Washington Post*, they need to raise wages, and our country should allow more legal immigration. Instead, unbelievably, “American child labor is making a comeback.” Children will pay a stiff price for this policy, said Steven Greenhouse in *Los Angeles Times*. During the pandemic, many kids fell behind academically, and research shows that working 20 hours a week or more makes high school students more likely to drop out. So in the long run, enabling teens to hold jobs makes it more likely they will quit school and “ultimately become lower-paid, less-productive workers.” This cruel, exploitive idea will only “hurt America’s overall economy in the long run.”

Wisconsin: A judicial race of national import

“The most important election this year” is happening in Wisconsin next week, said **Andy Wong** in *The Guardian*. A “staggering” \$31 million in donations has flooded the race for a supreme court seat in a pivotal swing state that pits progressive Milwaukee County Judge Janet Protasiewicz against conservative Trump ally Daniel Kelly; the winner will tip the court’s balance to 4-3 in favor of either progressives or conservatives. Protasiewicz has openly said Wisconsin’s legislative and congressional maps were “rigged” in 2021 and 2022 to favor rural Republican areas, and should be redrawn. Either Kelly or Protasiewicz will cast the deciding vote on challenges to an 1849 state law banning nearly all abortions—which was activated after *Roe* fell. This “sleeper race” could even decide the winner of the 2024 presidential election, said **Greg Sargent** in *The Washington Post*. If the election is as close as the 1-point Biden win in 2020, Kelly—who has “sterling MAGA credentials”—might “greenlight dubious efforts” to overturn the result.



High stakes: Protasiewicz and Kelly

Protasiewicz and her big-money Democratic backers have made this race an “expensive and tawdry affair,” said **Collin Levy** in *The Wall Street Journal*. By giving the public “an open-kimono

tour of her political opinions,” Protasiewicz has violated norms of judicial decorum. She has said, among other things, it “should be a woman’s right” to have an abortion—essentially promising to rule that way. All that “pales next to Kelly’s entanglement,” said **Charlie Sykes** in *The Bulwark*. In 2020, the state Republican Party and the Republican National Committee paid him \$120,000 for legal advice on efforts to overturn Joe Biden’s win in Wisconsin, including a “fake electors” scheme. At a recent forum, he defended nakedly partisan gerrymandering, saying “a redistricting map is an entirely political act.”

This election “shouldn’t be occurring in the first place,” said **Jonathan Bernstein** in *Bloomberg*. Choosing judges by popular vote is “a terrible idea.” Judges are supposed to be independent actors whose judicial philosophies do not preclude evaluating cases on their legal merits. Having voters pick judges ensures that “abortion rights and other hot-button topics” will matter more than their experience, temperament, and fitness for the job. This off-year election will have a low turnout, so the winner will be chosen by the most partisan voters. It’s “a bad way of doing democracy, whatever the outcome.”

Wit & Wisdom

“Keep a little fire burning; however small, however hidden.”
Cormac McCarthy, quoted in *LitHub*

“Art is theft, art is armed robbery, art is not pleasing your mother.”
Janet Malcolm, quoted in *The New Republic*

“The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.”
F. Scott Fitzgerald, quoted in *Time*

“To live is to change, to be perfect is to have changed often.”
Cardinal Newman, quoted in *the Harrogate Advertiser (U.K.)*

“Be fearful when others are greedy, and greedy when others are fearful.”
Warren Buffett, quoted in *Barron’s*

“If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”
Shirley Chisholm, quoted in *Built in Chicago*

“Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic.”
Martin Luther King Jr., quoted in *UMSL Daily*

Education: The battle over ‘parents’ rights’

A culture war battle over public school curricula “took center stage” on Capitol Hill last week, said **Lauren Gambino** in *The Guardian*, as the GOP-led House passed the Parents Bill of Rights Act on a near party-line vote. The bill serves as a national “rallying cry” for Republicans amid an impassioned political struggle over what is taught in the nation’s schools. For two years, red-state legislatures have enacted or considered “a dizzying array of new proposals” restricting what public school teachers can say and what books students can read about sex, gender, and America’s racial history. The federal bill would require public schools to post online their class curricula, reading lists, and the books in their libraries, and to notify parents if their children change their pronouns. Republicans said the bill would curtail indoctrination of kids with “left-wing ideology,” while Democrats argued that it would promote “extreme MAGA Republican ideology.”

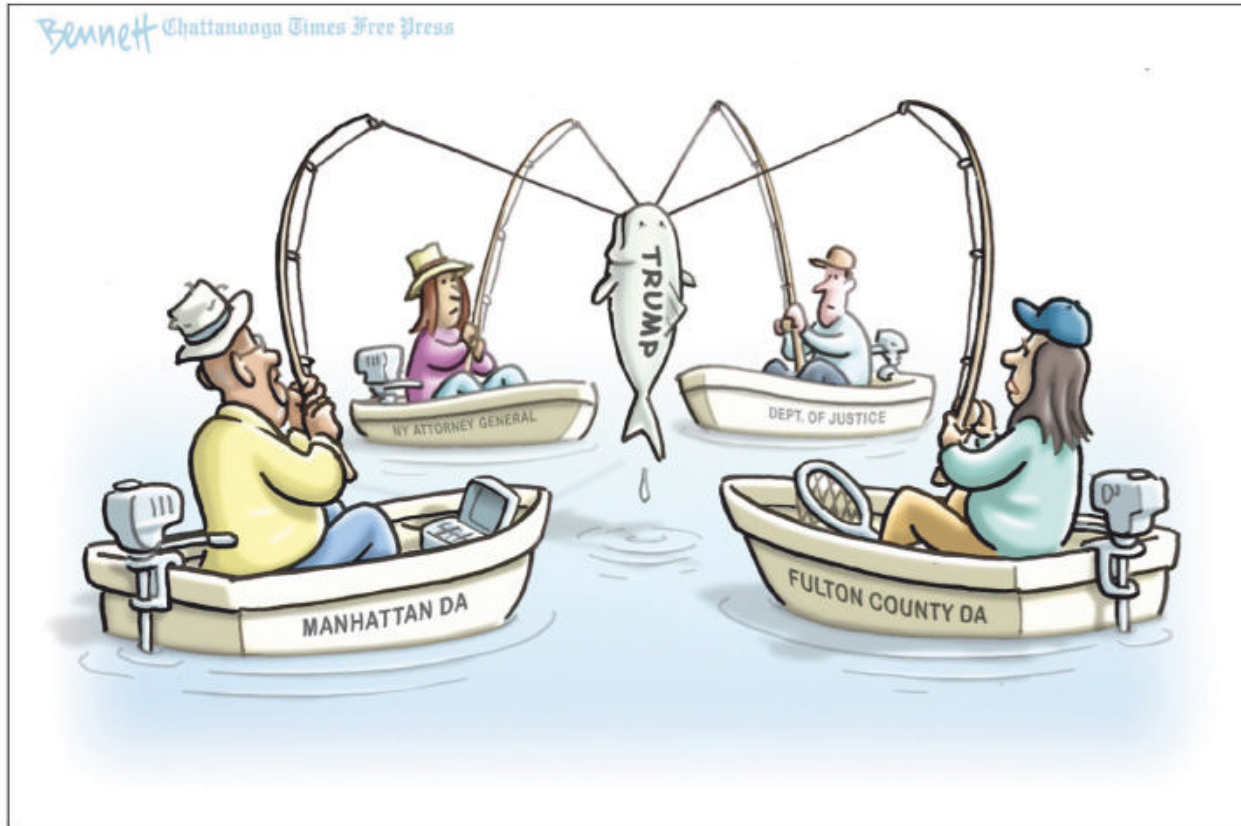
With no chance of the act passing the Democratic-controlled Senate, “critics will dismiss it as a messaging bill,” said *National Review* in an editorial. So let’s consider the “unsettling” message sent by its Democratic opponents. At a time of legitimate debate over “sexually explicit material for young

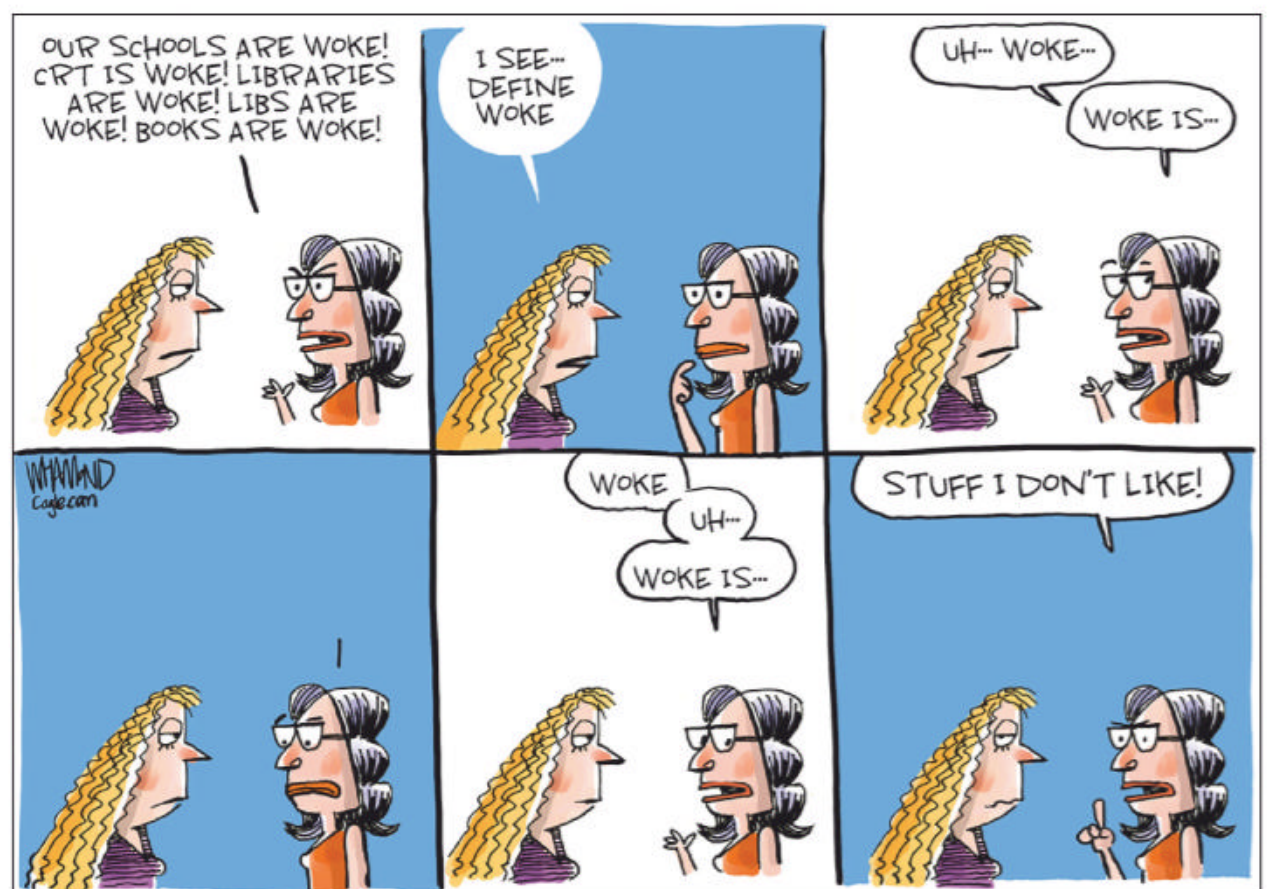
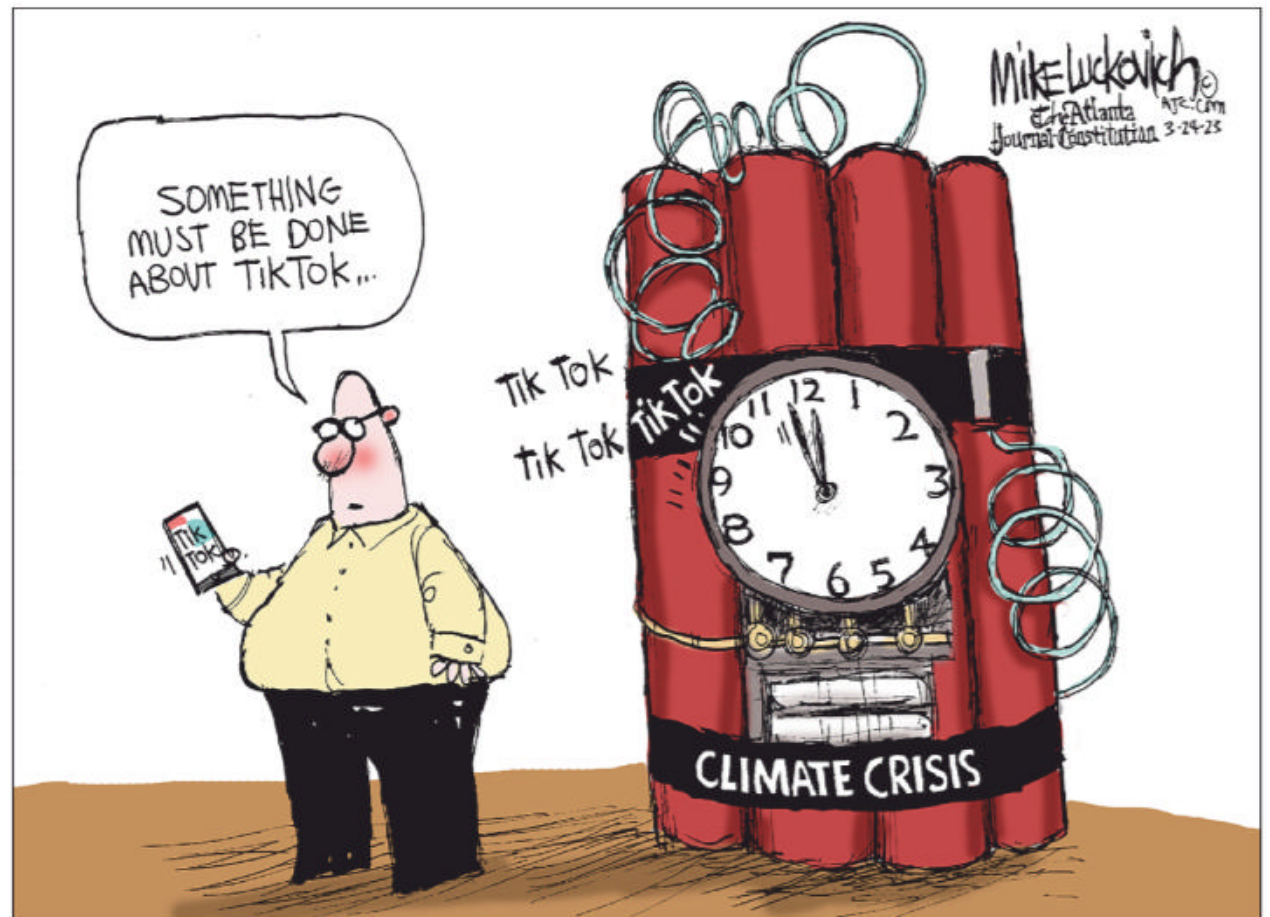
readers” and the teaching of “critical race theory,” they want to “treat normal parental oversight and curiosity” as intrusive, unnecessary, and even “dangerous for children.” Progressives need to be reminded of an essential truth: “Parents are the primary educators of their children,” and schools should not dictate how kids are raised.

It’s conservatives who want to dictate what kids are allowed to learn, said **Jamelle Bouie** in *The New York Times*. What “parents’ rights” really means is giving “a conservative and reactionary minority” the authority to remove books or “shut down lessons on the basis of the political discomfort they feel.” What about the rights of parents who want schools to accept gender-nonconforming students and teach about “the darker parts of American history?” Republicans, however, strongly believe parental rights is a winning issue for them, said **Declan Garvey** in *The Dispatch*. GOP presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis “has led the way on education battles” as Florida’s governor, and his 2024 rival Donald Trump “has taken the hint,” proposing measures such as letting parents vote to choose school principals. All he has to do is bring up schools and parents’ rights, Trump noted at a recent rally, “and the place goes crazy.”

Poll watch

■ **56%** of Americans, including **87%** of Democrats and **18%** of Republicans, believe the investigations into former President Donald Trump are fair. **41%** believe the investigations are a “witch hunt.” **61%** of Americans do not want Trump to be president again, while **38%**—including **76%** of Republicans—want him to be elected to another term. Just **39%** of Americans hold a favorable view of the former president.
NPR/PBS/Marist





Tech banking: Running scared in Silicon Valley

Silicon Valley will not be the same after the collapse of its home bank, said **Therese Poletti** in *MarketWatch*. “So far in this downturn, investors have been focused on the big revamp going on in Big Tech and other large publicly traded firms, which have been cutting jobs, selling real-estate assets, and reducing office space in response to Wall Street’s concerns.” But Silicon Valley Bank was “at the core of venture-capital funding,” the lifeblood of startups. The trouble for smaller tech firms began last year, when the Federal Reserve started raising rates, ending the “era of free money.” In 2022, venture funding fell 31 percent from the year prior. Some are calling this a comeuppance after “12 to 13 years of insane growth, often irresponsible spending, hubris, and swagger.” All that easy capital helped fuel terrific tech success stories, but “also frauds and debacles like Theranos and WeWork.”

The bank run “showed how much fear was already in the market,” said **Erin Griffith** in *The New York Times*. “SVB offered many startups a form of credit that other banks found too risky,” extending debt that was secured by venture funding. It enabled many companies to “stretch their money to the next round of funding.” Now, one VC fund backer said, “a quarter to a third of the companies his funds had backed would run out of money in the next six months.” In a recent survey of 870 found-



SVB loans let startups stretch their funding.

ers, 22 percent fretted that they might not be able to raise any funding this year. The acquisition this week of SVB’s remaining loans and deposits by First Citizens BancShares might ease some of the anxiety.

Still, said **Brian Merchant** in the *Los Angeles Times*, the tech sector needed to be brought back to earth. SVB “catered to an industry where showering unproven companies with cash is the norm, with venture capitalists competing among themselves to see who can make it rain the hardest.” That’s a system that “breeds recklessness.”

I’m surprised it took this long for the “move fast and break things” tech ethos to break down.

And now that it has, the people who could keep it together are nowhere to be found, said **Anita Ramaswamy** in *Reuters*. During the banking crisis of 1907, J. Pierpont Morgan “corralled his peers into using their own money to calm the crisis.” JPMorgan Chase’s chief executive, Jamie Dimon, has been attempting to do the same to rescue troubled First Republic. But when SVB started faltering, “venture capitalists did the opposite of pitch in, publicly encouraging companies to yank their funds.” Silicon Valley obviously has no shortage of tech billionaires, and yet none of them has stood up to “restore confidence in the banks that grease their industry’s wheels.”

Innovation of the week



A new gaming laptop claims to be fully customizable in a snap, said **Sean Hollister** in *The Verge*. Framework has introduced what it’s calling the “holy grail for gamers, creators, and others”: a fully modular gaming laptop, in which most parts can be swapped out, repaired, or upgraded. “The secret, as I understand it,” is that “you can replace your laptop’s butt with as big a butt as you’d like.” A piece of the laptop’s rear “can slide out and be replaced” with another module independently of the rest of the system. The Framework Laptop 16 also “lets you hotswap out the entire keyboard and touch pad” and replace them with different modules, like a piano keyboard or a touch screen—even while the machine is running.

Bytes: What’s new in tech

Air taxi plans for O’Hare

Within two years, there could be a new way to get to Chicago’s O’Hare Airport, said **Stefano Esposito** in the *Chicago Sun-Times*: an electric “air taxi.” Archer Aviation makes fully electric aircraft capable of both flying like a plane and landing like a helicopter. Such aircraft haven’t yet been certified by the Federal Aviation Administration. But that hasn’t stopped Archer and its investor, United Airlines, from going forward with plans for the first commercial air-taxi route between downtown Chicago and its largest international airport starting in 2025. According to the companies, the low-altitude ride would only take about 10 minutes from Chicago’s downtown heliport to the terminal. Archer says it wants the price to be competitive with the high-end Uber Black, or about \$100 per trip.

Don’t mess with Texas, SpaceX

Elon Musk’s “Texas utopia” is encountering resistance from the locals, said **Julie Bykowicz** and **Ted Mann** in *The Wall Street Journal*. “Musk’s tunneling venture, the Boring Company, and space-transportation company SpaceX are constructing massive buildings” on more than 200 acres of unincorporated land along the Colorado River, where Musk

also wants to develop “a 110-home subdivision for employees.” Dozens of residents of Bastrop County, “a bastion of ranching and agriculture” near Austin, appeared at “a heated public meeting” last week to object to the companies’ attempt to gain a permit to build their own wastewater treatment plant. The plant would “spray treated water on fields or discharge it into the river,” alarming attendees seeking “more assurances from state environmental officials.”

Chipmakers vs. environmental rules

U.S. chipmakers, including Intel, IBM, and Nvidia, are fighting to squelch legislation banning PFAS and other “forever chemicals,” said **Patrick Temple-West** in the *Financial Times*. More than 30 U.S. states this year are considering ways to address PFAS, chemical substances that are slow to break down and have been linked to increased rates of infertility, decreased fetal growth, and increased kidney cancer risk. PFAS are “widely used in products from non-stick cookware to firefighting foam,” as well as in electronics. Chipmakers say there are “typically no alternatives” to PFAS for their semiconductor products, and they have warned that bans being proposed in Europe would cause “widespread disruption.”

Reuters

THE WEEK Junior

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It's all in the pages of
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Spring is a season of fresh beginnings—the ideal time to inspire your child's natural curiosity with *The Week Junior* magazine.

Every page is written and designed by our experts to get kids reading and learning—and eager to explore the world around them.

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Life on Earth may have come from space

We now have proof that one of the key building blocks for life could have come to Earth from space. Samples that the Japanese space probe Hayabusa2 collected from the Ryugu asteroid in 2019 have just been analyzed. They were found to contain organic molecules, including uracil, a nucleobase (nitrogen-containing compound) that is key to RNA, the substance that enables the production of proteins and life itself. Uracil and other nucleobases had previously been detected in meteorites that fell to Earth, reports *Popular Mechanics*, so the theory that life came from elsewhere isn't new. But

with the meteorites, there was always the possibility that the nucleobases had come from the soil or water the celestial object crashed into. "Since the Hayabusa2 spacecraft collected two samples directly from asteroid Ryugu and delivered them to Earth in sealed capsules," says project co-leader Yasuhiro Oba, from Hokkaido University, "contamination can be ruled out." The asteroid samples date back to the time our planet was forming, some 4.5 billion years ago. Finding organic compounds in them adds to evidence that the precursors to life originated in space and were seeded on Earth by meteorites bil-



Ryugu asteroid: Harboring organic compounds

lions of years ago. The discovery is important not only because it adds to our understanding of our origins but also because it implies that the same process could have occurred elsewhere in the universe.



Patients on ventilators are at higher risk.

Deadly fungus is spreading

A drug-resistant fungus has been spreading alarmingly through hospitals and nursing homes, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said last week. First reported in the U.S. in 2016, clinical cases of *Candida auris* have skyrocketed since then, from about 500 cases in 2019 to 2,377 in 2022. The fungus can be harmless on the skin, but if it gets inside the body and enters the bloodstream—which can happen in patients using devices such as catheters, central lines, or ventilators—it can be fatal. Nearly half of patients with *C. auris* die within 90 days, although since nearly all of those patients also have an underlying condition, it's unclear how many deaths are caused by the fungus. The CDC says the pandemic likely fueled the spread of the fungus, both because there were more patients on ventilators and because doctors and nurses were forced to reuse gloves and masks that would normally be changed between patients. Because *C. auris* spreads easily from person to person, it is hard to stamp out. "Once it sets up shop, in a nursing home for example, it's almost impossible to eradicate," Scott Roberts, an infectious-disease specialist at Yale School of Medicine, tells CNN. "Once it's on patients, too, it can kind of just be colonized for years, if not their life."

Save the night sky

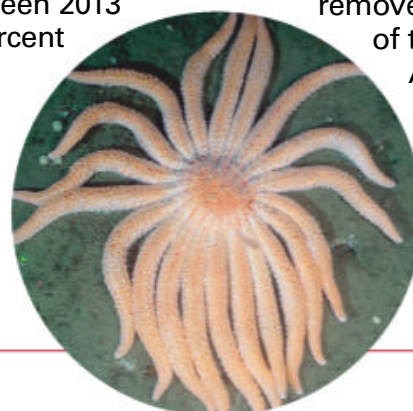
Light pollution has become so prevalent that it is growing increasingly difficult to get astronomical readings, reports *Space.com*. Between 1992 and 2017, the amount of artificial light grew by about 50 percent worldwide—and by as much as 400 percent in certain regions. The result is that astronomers have run out of suitably remote locations where they can station new observatories. Even the Hubble Space Telescope, which orbits the Earth about 300 miles up, isn't immune to light pollution: This month, scientists found that more than 5 percent of recent Hubble photographs were streaked with trails from SpaceX's Starlink satellites. Starlink has some 3,700 satellites launched already, and other companies will soon add more. Writing in *Nature Astronomy* last week, astronomers issued an appeal for new global regulations to rein in the proliferation of lighted structures and limit new satellite launches. "If matters continue," they say, "dozens, hundreds, thousands of satellites will be seen crossing the skies at a given moment—and no human being will be able to admire the night sky as it was always possible to do."

Another scary tick disease

A once rare tick-borne disease is becoming ever more common in the U.S., reports *NBCNews.com*. Babesiosis, a malaria-like illness, causes fever, chills, sweats, headaches, and body aches, and can be severe or even fatal in people with compromised immune systems. Cases of the parasitic disease shot up between 2011 and 2019, according to a new study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The disease was already endemic across the Northeast and Midwest in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. The new report adds Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont to that list. The parasite *Babesia microti* is typically found in mice and other rodents and is transported to humans by infected deer ticks—the same tiny ticks that can harbor Lyme disease. Its rise is likely being driven by the warming of the climate, which has enabled deer ticks to expand their range northward and better survive the winters. The CDC advises people in the affected states to practice tick-bite prevention methods: wear long pants, avoid long grass, and use insect repellants.

Why sea stars are vital

The sunflower sea star, the largest starfish in the world, is on the verge of extinction. The star, which can sport 24 limbs and span more than 3 feet from tip to tip, was once ubiquitous along the Pacific Coast. But between 2013 and 2017, more than 90 percent of the species was wiped out by sea star wasting syndrome, in what is thought to be the largest marine disease outbreak ever recorded. Scientists believe the epidemic is caused by a pathogen and



linked to climate change, as the disease spreads faster in warmer waters. The animal's decline has been devastating for California's kelp forests. Sunflower sea stars consume kelp-eating sea urchins, which have exploded in population since the starfish went into decline. "When you remove the sea stars," Sadie Wright, of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries tells the *New York Times*, "you see the cascading effects." Wright and her colleagues have recommended that the animals be protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

We Are Electric: Inside the 200-Year Hunt for Our Body's Bioelectric Code, and What the Future Holds

by Sally Adee (Hachette, \$30)

Bioelectricity, as you may have heard, “can do fantastic things,” said **Simon Winchester** in *The New York Times*. Following two centuries during which the field was largely left to quacks, researchers are finally working in earnest to understand and manipulate what scientists recently labeled the electrome, meaning the totality of the electrical pulses that course through all 40 trillion cells in the human body. Sally Adee, an engaging science writer, has now done us a “sterling service” by compiling the full history of humanity’s stumbling efforts to grasp the potential of bioelectricity, which perhaps will provide an array of miracle cures. Better yet, she has done so “apparently without drinking the Kool-Aid of today’s many bioelectricity boosters.”

Adee’s primer on the subject is also “unex-



Bioelectricity: Our hidden superpower?

pectedly funny,” said **Meghan Rosen** in *Science News*. She casts Luigi Galvani as the hapless godfather of the field: In 1780, the Italian scientist showed that the legs of a dead frog twitched when touched with an electrical spark, which set off a frog-slaughtering frenzy. But Galvani’s hypothesis that bodies are animated by electricity was buried for generations by the attacks of a critic who wound up inventing the battery. Adee has fun ridiculing the bioelectric quackery that followed, such as the electric penis belts sold in the 1870s. But isn’t it almost as unlikely that the Pentagon recently bet \$16 million that bioelectric bandages

might speed healing? And Adee has experienced bioelectricity’s potential firsthand: Ten years ago, she served as a guinea pig in a Pentagon experiment and was thrown into a simulated battle untrained. She was, of course, hopeless—until a low-voltage current was sent to her brain and she instantly became a sharpshooting killing machine.

Adee acknowledges that any major cures tied to study of the electrome are a long way off, said **Richard Lea** in *The Wall Street Journal*. Though she notes potential difficulties such as finding volunteers willing to let their brains be zapped for research, “a more basic question is whether the concept of an electrome is grounded enough to provide a foundation for research.” There is, unfortunately, no one single building block of the electrome but instead “a bewildering array of ions, cells, and tissues.” We have, however, badly needed a strong general-interest book on this topic, said **Simon Ings** in *The Times* (U.K.). After all, it is bioelectricity, not DNA, that decides how the body is formed, down to details such as where our eyes, nose, and mouth are placed. “The wonder is that this news will come as such a shock to so many readers.”

Novel of the week

Biography of X

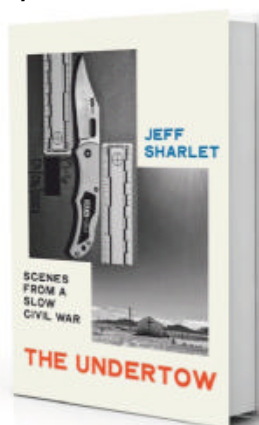
by Catherine Lacey

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$28)

With her “genre-quaking” new novel, Catherine Lacey has created a protagonist who functions as “an unstable new element in the periodic table of literature,” said **Hillary Kelly** in *The Atlantic*. X is a woman who appeared out of nowhere in 1972 to become a celebrated shape-shifting artist in the mode of Cindy Sherman or David Bowie, and the biography we are reading is an attempt by X’s widow to nail down who X was. The story plays out against an alternate history in which the U.S. split violently into three territories in 1945. X’s personal history also enfold those of many real-life artists, and the effect proves “pleasingly disorienting.” Initially, Lacey’s dedication to her “bizarro-world” reality felt irksome, said **Jessica Ferri** in the *Los Angeles Times*. I was more enamored with Lacey’s aphoristic sentences, and I wished to hear more about the central love story. “But the ending of this novel changed my thinking, and confirmed that Lacey is one of the most fearless novelists writing today.” This book questions art. It questions love, too.

The Undertow: Scenes From a Slow Civil War

by Jeff Sharlet (Norton, \$29)



long immersed himself in church congregations, political rallies, and other gatherings that offer potential keys to understanding the belief system of the Right. His latest book adds more such stories as it zeroes in on the common belief among supporters of Donald Trump that the U.S. is headed toward another civil war, and it reminds me of Joan Didion’s masterful 1968 essay collection, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. “Both books are mood-altering, mind-altering odysseys; both set forth visions of a weird and roiling body politic.”

Didion chronicled a moment when it felt as if the center could not hold, said **Mark Dery**

“Jeff Sharlet is a kind of anthropologist of the Trumpocene,” said **Elizabeth D. Samet** in *The American Scholar*. A magazine writer, Dartmouth writing professor, and author of two books on Christian fundamentalism, Sharlet has

in *4Columns*. “Over a half-century later, the chaos is the center,” and Sharlet is an able guide, deftly linking today’s conspiracy theories and widespread belief in an apocalyptic confrontation to the fundamentalist fervor of the Great Awakenings in America’s past. He also excels at winning the trust of his subjects. At one striking moment, a Trump true believer he has befriended steels herself to inform him, through tears, that Bill and Hillary Clinton eat children. But Sharlet largely leaves readers to make what they will of such madness, making *The Undertow* feel “at once urgently important and inconclusive.”

“If a war is coming, even a metaphorical one, what are its terms?” asked **Adam Fleming Petty** in *The Washington Post*. As Sharlet visits an open-carry restaurant in Colorado or reports from a rally for Ashli Babbitt, the woman killed when she joined those storming the Capitol on Jan. 6, he makes clear that the grievances of Trump Nation aren’t coherent. But he does propose that what the mostly white crowds at these events want most is to reclaim the sense of innocence they once had about their racial identity. Sharlet’s “mythic-religious approach” gets to the heart of the matter better than polls can. In both style and ambition, “this is journalism as art.”

Best books...chosen by Tara Conklin

Novelist Tara Conklin is the best-selling author of *The Last Romantics*. In her new comic novel, *Community Board*, a woman holed up alone in her childhood home after a breakup slowly reconnects with her neighbors through an online community board.



Look at Me by Jennifer Egan (2001). For those familiar with Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad*, the multilayered brilliance of this novel will come as no surprise. After a car accident, a fashion model becomes unrecognizable and must reinvent herself entirely. Subplots involving a PI, a teenage girl, and a would-be terrorist all converge in a stunning conclusion. Egan writes like no other—I'd follow her anywhere.

Blindness by José Saramago (1995). Although you can read this novel as an allegory, it works equally well as a dystopian thriller. What would happen if everyone in the world suddenly went blind? Thrilling, terrifying, and utterly plausible, this book will keep you up long past your bedtime.

Enduring Love by Ian McEwan (1997). The opening scene ranks among the best I've read: a hot-air balloon rising into the sky, a child alone in the basket, and a man dangling helplessly from a rope. Five men rush across an open field to help. From that point of tragedy onward, the characters' lives are intertwined in a suspenseful story of obsession and paranoia.

A Constellation of Vital Phenomena by Anthony Marra (2013). There are so many things I love about this book. Sonja, the sole doctor in a war-torn city; Havaa, an 8-year-old girl whose father is kidnapped by soldiers; the way Marra shifts seamlessly from one point of view to the next. Set against the Chechen war, this novel is a heartbreaker.

What I Loved by Siri Hustvedt (2003). Sometimes one event is so meaningful that it divides life into *before* and *after*. Hustvedt examines this by presenting a story in two halves separated by one unimaginable tragedy. That event shakes every character in this beautifully written, evocative novel of family, love, and art.

Bel Canto by Ann Patchett (2001). About as close to a perfect novel as you can get. A group of terrorists break into a state dinner and, realizing their intended target isn't in attendance, decide to hold the entire party hostage. Gradually, the shock and violence of the initial attack fades, and relationships begin to develop between the hostages and their captors.

Author of the week

Priya Guns

Priya Guns has created a Travis Bickle for our own time, said **Meredith Maran** in the *Los Angeles Times*. In Guns' "piercingly funny, scathingly censorious" debut novel, *Your Driver Is Waiting*, the protagonist is an angry young Sri



Lankan immigrant who drives for a ride-share company and struggles to support her recently wid-

owed invalid mother. Guns aimed to reimagine Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, and she admits to vast hopes for the book. "I see readers so compelled by Damani's story that they begin to act in solidarity towards dismantling our current system, redistributing wealth and power amongst all of us," she says. But Guns also believes in entertaining readers, and has thrown Damani into a fast-moving plot and a chance romance with a woman who's a wealthy white liberal. "I'd be happy if *Your Driver Is Waiting* makes people laugh," the author says.

Guns comes by rebelliousness honestly, said **Sarah Neilson** in *Shondaland*. Growing up in Toronto, she saw how hard it was for her mother and father to get by as a cleaner and security guard. "I [grew] up very angry from opening a fridge and being like, 'Everyone's working, but why is there nothing in here?'" she says. Now a writer, actress, and Ph.D. candidate, Guns often juggled two or three jobs from age 16. One thing she hadn't ever been was a driver, but she taught herself to drive a stick shift just to get into Damani's headspace. "While writing, I was dressing like Damani, even loving like her. I didn't intend to do that." She also didn't intend to write a satire, but accepts the label. "We're living in a time where everything is absurd," she says. "The comedy almost writes itself."

Also of interest...in outsiders and exiles

The Exceptions

by Kate Zernike (Scribner, \$30)



When you read about Nancy Hopkins' long career, "you may feel the need to knock a hole in the wall," said Bonnie Garmus in *The New York Times*. A molecular biologist who joined MIT's faculty in 1973, she suffered countless indignities before becoming the unlikely leader of an inside group that documented pervasive discrimination against the small number of women on the school's faculty. Their work shook up higher education, and this excellent book is packed with "jaw-dropping" details.

A Stranger in Your Own City

by Ghaith Abdul-Ahad (Knopf, \$30)



Though many books have been written about the war in Iraq, "this one matters," said Renad Mansour in *The Guardian*. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad is a Baghdad native who turned to journalism shortly after the U.S. invasion, and his ground-level account shatters Western assumptions about the violent sectarian strife that has since made his city and country unrecognizable. Ghaith at least holds out hope that younger Iraqis will force reform. "At some point, he argues, change is inevitable."

Künstlers in Paradise

by Cathleen Schine (Holt, \$28)



Cathleen Schine's latest novel is, among other things, "a profound meditation on the nature and power of storytelling," said Priscilla Gilman in *The Boston Globe*. At the onset of the pandemic, an aimless young New Yorker gets stranded at the Venice, Calif., home of his grandmother. A Holocaust refugee, she soon begins entertaining him with tales of 1940s Hollywood and its émigré community. Schine brings her usual wit and deft touch to the story, and its "warmth and wisdom" prove uplifting.

Picasso the Foreigner

by Annie Cohen-Solal (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$40)



Pablo Picasso is too easily remembered as an art-world Superman, said Hamilton Cain in *The Wall Street Journal*. This "astute" new biography reminds us that the Spanish artist spent most of his life as a watchful outsider. From the moment Picasso arrived in Paris at 19, French authorities surveilled him as a potential anarchist. French critics were also among the last to celebrate his greatness. By focusing on his vulnerability, this absorbing book "captures a facet of Picasso's character long overlooked."



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Exhibit of the week**Beyond the Light: Identity and Place in Nineteenth-Century Danish Art**

Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York City, through April 16

If the dry-sounding title makes this show seem skippable, reconsider, said **Sebastian Smee** in *The Washington Post*. “A lot of terrific art emerges from national trauma,” and this exhibition, which moves to the Getty Center in Los Angeles next month, demonstrates how drawn-out the renaissance can be under certain circumstances. The 1803–15 Napoleonic Wars were catastrophic for Denmark. The once-mighty country endured the bombardment of Copenhagen by Britain and the loss of most of its merchant and naval fleet. It then made an alliance with France, triggering an economic collapse that forced it to cede Norway to Sweden. “Often, when a nation loses its self-esteem, it looks to its artists to alleviate the shame,” and Danish artists responded in the first half of the century with much work that’s “quietly poetic” but too often feels “spiritually vacant.” Only after the passing of this so-called golden age did some Danish artists strike off in rewarding directions.

Most of the 90 drawings and paintings in this show are modest and reserved—



Eckersberg's 'At a Window in the Artist's Studio'

“subdued with a vengeance,” said **Lance Esplund** in *The Wall Street Journal*. Many Danish artists of the early 19th century, encouraged by their mentor Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, rushed outdoors to capture Denmark’s landscape and people through direct observation and fealty to realism. Though the lesser works gathered for this show “err toward the persnickety and polite,” the best “achieve a transcendent idealism” and are “as welcome and

soothing as a cool breeze.” In other countries, artists have responded to war and devastation by lashing out, but the Danes “became more introverted and contemplative.” Perhaps that explains why the first image visitors see is an excellent 1826 Wilhelm Bendz painting that shows his artist friend Ditlev Blunck looking in a mirror as he works in a cramped studio on a small painting of his own.

All the work here is worth seeing, said **Holland Cotter** in *The New York Times*. “From the moment you enter the galleries, you’re in for an experience of slow-down, move-close looking and thinking,” and Eckersberg’s own work deserves some of the credit. The instigator of the Danish golden age believed that by applying precisely calculated linear perspective, he could achieve a marriage of science and art. A “spectacular” Copenhagen panorama here suggests he was right. Many younger artists struggled to fully embrace his faith in the power of pure line, and it wouldn’t be until Vilhelm Hammershoi arrived in the 1880s that Denmark produced an artist who struck a balance between programmatic optimism and existential gloom. But many of Eckersberg’s followers were wonderful draftsmen. Christen Kobke, for one, was a marvel: “What a hand! And what a pair of alert, tender eyes.”

Lana Del Rey

Did You Know That There’s a Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd ★★★★★



“More than any of its predecessors, this Lana Del Rey album is about the very heart of things,” said **Lindsay Zoladz** in *The New York Times*. The singer-songwriter, now 37,

arrived as a major artist “sounding like a nihilist.” But 11 years later, she’s “seriously self-scrutinizing” and asking big questions, about God, marriage, family, and motherhood. Though this 78-minute album is “marked by occasional overindulgence,” it’s Del Rey’s strongest since the “sublime” *Norman F---king Rockwell*. “Del Rey will be recognized as a voice of her generation,” said **Bobby Olivier** in *Spin*. Here, though, she seems more coolly aloof than ever, and *Under Ocean Blvd*, across its “lulling” run time, becomes “a chore to ingest.” Del Rey is “a great American collage artist,” said **Mikael Wood** in the *Los Angeles Times*. She and her co-producers keep this album interesting by constantly folding in “unexpected sounds and textures.” Meanwhile, her “richly expressive” singing “holds your attention in part because you’re never quite sure where her melodies will go.”

Luke Combs

Gettin’ Old

★★★★★



Luke Combs’ fourth album is “equal parts ambitious and familiar,” said **Alex Hopper** in *American Songwriter*. Once again, the award-winning country singer-songwriter “reminisces

about the good times, falls in love, and finds happiness in the simple things.” But Combs comes across here as more thoughtful and mature. “With his trademark rasp,” the 33-year-old sings about fatherly love on “Take You With Me” and “See Me Now.” Fans who follow his personal life will hear those lyrics as “deeply emotive.” The Nashville star mostly stays in his comfort zone of everyman anthems, said **Will Groff** in *Holler*. But there are “unexpectedly engaging” moments here when Combs “transcends the limits of his own dependability.” The smart, warm ballad “Joe,” for example, “slowly reveals itself as the rare commercial country song that treats alcoholism with any degree of seriousness.” The highlight, however, is Combs’ take on Tracy Chapman’s “Fast Car”—“a rare glimpse of what his voice can do when paired with material genuinely worthy of his talents.”

Depeche Mode

Memento Mori

★★★★★



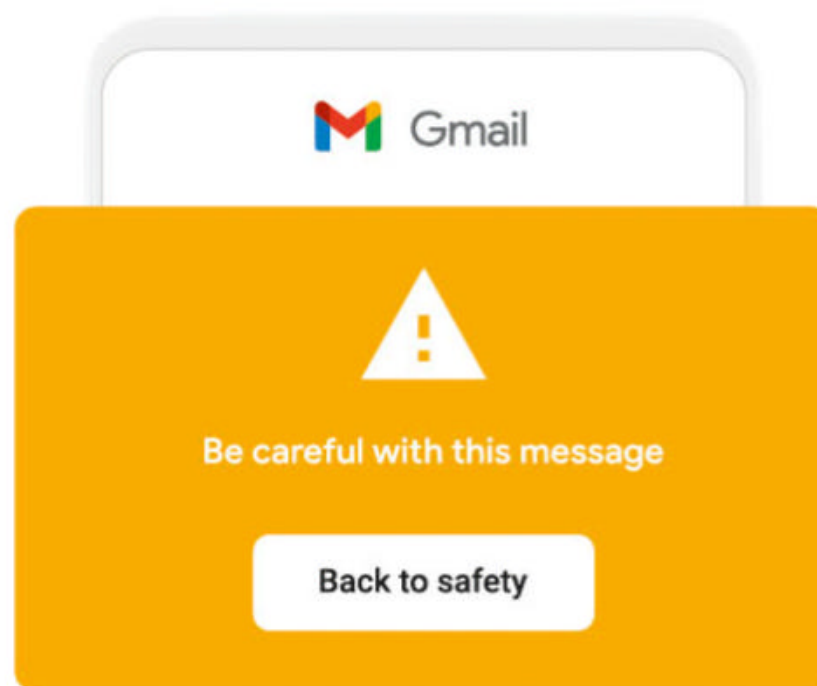
“A sense of surrender is the essential ingredient to Depeche Mode now,” said **Kory Grow** in *Rolling Stone*. The British synth-pop band has specialized in melancholy since the

early 1980s, and now that the 2022 death of keyboardist Andy Fletcher has reduced the group to a duo, Dave Gahan, 60, and Martin Gore, 61, have devoted the entire 15th Depeche Mode album to pondering loss and life’s fleeting nature. Even so, the record “never feels heavy-handed or all that sullen. Some tracks even sound upbeat.” The record opens ominously, with “industrial piston crushes and a haunted cosmic haze,” said **Neil Z. Yeung** in *AllMusic*. Several songs give fans exactly what they want, though, especially the single “Ghosts Again”—one of the best Depeche Mode songs ever. “The melancholy beauty of this heartbreaker sparkles through the tears.” By facing mortality and rekindling their friendship, Gahan and Gore “transform tragedy into something profound and universally relatable.” *Memento Mori* is “their most moving statement in decades.”



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Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves

Directed by John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein
(PG-13)



A group of adventurers plots an epic heist.

The new Dungeons & Dragons movie “has the good sense to invite the uninitiated,” said **Richard Lawson** in *Vanity Fair*. “Homage and gentle parody at once,” this surprisingly charming action-comedy serves “a feast of fan worship” without alienating those of us who have never played the fantasy role-playing game. Chris Pine stars as a lute-strumming bard whose ragtag band of thieves is on a quest to retrieve a relic, revive his dead wife, and rescue his estranged daughter from Hugh Grant’s roguish villain. “Everyone seems to be enjoying themselves, and it’s hard not to follow suit,” thanks to the screenplay’s “winning blend of sincerity and silliness.” The constant action, though, “doesn’t



Pine and his team of thieves

allow for much else,” said **Brian Tallerico** in *RogerEbert.com*. Because the busy plot mimics the spontaneity of D&D’s tabletop game play, the script “feels like it’s often making itself up as it goes along.” Some plotlines prove “oddly unsatisfying,” with supposedly lighthearted twists feeling forced. Still, Chris Pine “keeps this thing buoyant, even when the plot turns start piling up,” said **David Fear** in *Rolling Stone*. The charismatic *Star Trek* actor “knows how to play off his fellow actors,” and even with Michelle Rodriguez, *Bridgerton*’s Regé-Jean Page, and *It’s a Wonderful Life*’s Sophia Lillis as sidekicks, “Pine is the secret sauce, the one making this movie fun—like vintage summer-blockbuster kind of fun.” (In theaters only)

The Lost King

Directed by Stephen Frears
(PG-13)



An amateur outsmarts Britain’s historians.

The new historical detective story starring Sally Hawkins “winds up being a paean to unconventionality,” said **Ann Hornaday** in *The Washington Post*. The Oscar-nominated star of *The Shape of Water* portrays Philippa Langley, the amateur historian who in 2012 led the successful search for the grave of King Richard III. Hawkins is “alternately elfin and flinty” as Langley, who faces dismissal at every turn when she sets out to prove that the Shakespearean villain was unfairly maligned by the Tudors. The feisty sleuth suffers from chronic fatigue syndrome and thus relates to Richard’s struggle with a spinal deformity, and her “mystical connection” to the dead king is at the heart of the



Hawkins unwinds with Steve Coogan.

film. “With this much thematic richness, *The Lost King* ought to be better than it is,” said **Peter Rainer** in *The Christian Science Monitor*. The comedy-drama “often seems distinctly underpowered,” and it didn’t need to cheapen Langley’s obsession by adding dreamlike visitations from Richard. Still, “the film scores where it counts most.” It’s a warm if languid portrait of an underdog who finds her purpose while righting historical wrongs, said **Jeanette Catsoulis** in *The New York Times*. “The movie’s sweetness is cut with enough acid—including subversive digs at academic pomposity—that it never becomes cloying.” Also, “Sally Hawkins is a gift. When she smiles, it’s a face-splitting beam.” (In theaters only)

Bad Cinderella

Imperial Theatre, New York City ★★★★★

“To clear up the obvious question,” this *Cinderella* isn’t bad in some slangy modern sense, said **Naveen Kumar** in *Variety*. More simply, it “isn’t good.” The musical, created by a team that includes *Cats* impresario Andrew Lloyd Webber and Oscar-winning screenwriter Emerald Fennell, opened on Broadway last week following a wobbly, short-lived West End run in 2021. But a purportedly dramatic revision—which included adding the word *Bad* to the title—hasn’t fixed the show. It remains a “muddled and momentum-less” retooling of the fairy tale that surrounds its Cinderella with male and female hotties who label her “bad” because she rebels against the tyranny of their obsession with image.

That this is the supposedly improved version of the show “beggars the imagination,” said **Jesse Green** in *The New York Times*. Aiming for feminist revisionism, it lacks the grit of the Grimms, the sweetness



Genao in rebel mode

of Disney, and the grace of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s 1957 musical adaptation. “Instead, it’s surprisingly vulgar, sexed-up, and dumbed-down: a parade of hustling women in bustiers and shirtless peck-rippling hunks.” If you go, bring earplugs

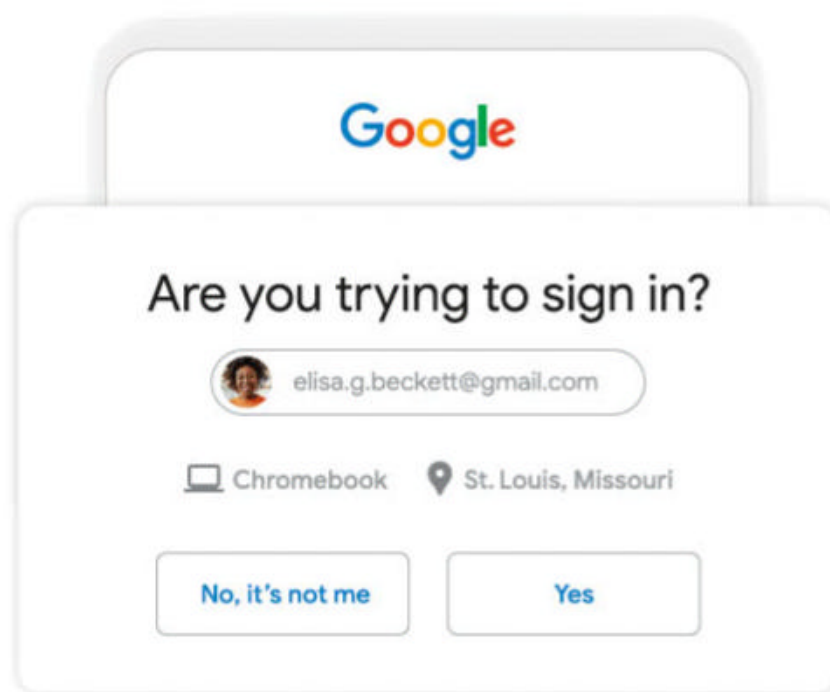
to drown out the “crushingly loud” music and tin-eared dialogue. “For that matter, bring eye plugs: The sets and costumes are as loud as the songs. If there were such a thing as soul plugs, I’d recommend them as well.”

The cast, at least, “tries valiantly to prevent the collapse of your interest,” said **Jackson McHenry** at *NYPMag.com*. As Cinderella, Linedy Genao is charmingly petulant, “although nobody may be incandescent enough to make an impression with a character so totally underwritten.” The show has also enlisted “two professional scene-stealers” in Carolee Carmello, playing a wicked stepmother, and Grace McLean, playing the queen. “Is that enough to make it good? No. Or bad in a fun, camp way? Absolutely not.” This musical “melted over me like a sludge of sherbet: sticky-sweet, acid-toned, zero nutritional value, prone to give you a mild headache.”



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Recent sci-fi movies you may have missed...

Prospect

Burned through *The Last of Us* and need more Pedro Pascal? Consider this strikingly similar lo-fi movie in which he plays a prospector on a remote moon who becomes an enigmatic father figure to a girl played by Sophie Thatcher. *Hulu*

Love and Monsters

Not even a monster apocalypse can stop true love in this charming 2020 genre-crossover. Dylan O'Brien (*Teen Wolf*) stars as a young survivor who leaves the safety of his communal bunker when he learns his girlfriend survived and is living 80 miles away. *Pluto TV*

I Am Mother

In this stark 2019 drama, a girl raised in a high-tech shelter by an android she knows as Mother is shocked when an actual woman, played by Hilary Swank, gains entry and offers details of an unexpected counter-reality. *Netflix*

Strawberry Mansion

In this low-budget, superbly surreal 2022 release, a dream auditor working for a surveillance state in 2035 visits an old woman who hasn't cooperated. When he travels into her reveries, he begins falling in love with her younger self. *\$3 on Vudu*

Next Exit

A young man and woman meet while each is making a cross-country road trip to volunteer for a program that promises a bridge to the afterlife for anyone willing to commit assisted suicide. This indie is less about the sci-fi than the journey. *Hulu*

Belle

An anime riff on *Beauty and the Beast*, Mamoru Hosoda's excellent 2022 film follows a teenager into a virtual world where she becomes a global pop superstar. She also begins obsessing over a beast she meets there. *\$5 on Amazon Prime*

The Week's guide to what's worth watching**Pretty Baby: Brooke Shields**

At 12, she appeared on the cover of *Playboy*. By 16, she was an international sex symbol who was hailed by *Time* as the face of the 1980s. Brooke Shields is now 57 and ready to tell the story of what that time in her life was like, and how she survived her exploitation by film directors, photographers, designers, and even her mother. In this two-part documentary, the actress and model also talks publicly for the first time about being sexually assaulted by a Hollywood movie executive. *Available Monday, April 3, Hulu*

Dave

At its best, the rap music of Dave Burd, aka Lil Dicky, is simultaneously funny, cringey, and big-hearted. So is the comedy series based on Burd's Lil Dicky persona. As the show's third season begins, the rapper is ready to bring his gawky, privileged, Eminem-meets-Bob Ross flow to the masses as he begins a tour to support his album *Penith*. *Wednesday, April 5, at 10 p.m., FXX*

The Good Mothers

For those born into the ruthless Calabrian crime syndicate, betrayal is a certain death sentence. This buzzed-about Italian series dramatizes true events of roughly a dozen years ago, when one wife and mother in the misogynistic clan died brutally after turning state's evidence. Seizing the moment, a female prosecutor launched a bold bid to recruit other women to take the same potentially deadly risk of turning against the syndicate to end its abusive hold on their families and nation. *Available Wednesday, April 5, Hulu*

Tiny Beautiful Things

What happens when a trainwreck of an adult becomes an advice columnist? In this new series based on a best-selling book by Cheryl Strayed, Kathryn Hahn plays Clare, a Strayed stand-in who's flailing as a writer, wife, and mother of a teenage daughter when a friend suggests she takes over an online advice column. Clare uses the opportunity to throw open the doors on her own life, regaling a growing audience of readers with funny, moving tales of her own failings and wise counsel she learned to heed herself. *Available Friday, April 7, Hulu*



Yeun, defended by a wall of his bros



Quentin Plair with Hahn in 'Tiny Beautiful Things'

Transatlantic

The fall of France in 1940 imperiled countless Jewish refugees who had entered the country seeking refuge from Nazi brutality. This new series focuses on a young U.S. magazine journalist, Varian Fry, who helped create a rescue committee in Marseille that focused on artists and intellectuals and eventually helped orchestrate the daring escape of 2,000 people, including Hannah Arendt, Marc Chagall, and André Breton. The show, based on a recent novel, can be expected to take liberties in fictionalizing Fry's personal life. *Debuts Friday, April 7, Netflix*

Other highlights**Grease: Rise of the Pink Ladies**

A prequel to *Grease* arrives in a new musical series that traces how four Rydell High outcasts recast themselves as the school's satin jacket-wearing bad girls. *Available Thursday, April 6, Paramount+*

Boom! Boom! The World vs. Boris Becker

John McEnroe is talked about as the bad boy of tennis, but Boris Becker is the ex-champ who just ended a prison sentence, as this documentary details. *Available Friday, April 7, Apple TV+*

Art in the 21st Century

A new season of the docuseries will offer a gas station performance by Miranda July and a look at Alex Da Corte's brightly colored installations. It will begin with an episode featuring Michelle Obama portraitist Amy Serrald. *Friday, April 7, at 10 p.m., PBS; check local listings*

Show of the week**Beef**

Ali Wong and Steven Yeun are all the rage. Road rage, that is. In this riotous new series, a near collision in a parking lot sets off the two drivers: Yeun's Danny, whose construction business is tanking, and Wong's Amy, a wealthy entrepreneur in an existential crisis. A car chase worthy of *The Fast and the Furious* follows. Cooler heads would move on. But Danny and Amy channel pent-up anger into an insane escalating battle for revenge. Smart writing and committed performances by the leads turn a cartoon premise into a can't-miss dark comedy. *Available Thursday, April 6, Netflix*

Critics' choice: Showtime for the food of the Black diaspora

Tatiana New York City

"I've never seen a restaurant address what's going on in the culture the way Tatiana by Kwame Onwuachi does," said Pete Wells in *The New York Times*. Onwuachi, a celebrated 33-year-old chef from the Bronx, has found himself a grand stage right inside Lincoln Center and is putting on a show that honors all the threads of Black culture he and so many other Americans share. There are dumplings filled with *egusi* soup and peekytoe crab—a two-way tribute to a favorite dish of his Nigerian father and the Shanghainese dumplings Onwuachi remembers eating in Queens. The Creole-style Mom Dukes shrimp draws on his mother's Gulf Coast roots, while some of the most thrilling dishes pull from his family's Caribbean heritage. But the menu is not a syllabus; "Onwuachi wants you to have fun," and Tatiana's diverse crowd gets that, dressing for a special night out and passing the many shareable dishes that are "both extravagant and homey." As Onwuachi knows, a small, expensive restaurant isn't the perfect vessel to democratize New York's food culture. Still, Tatiana "doesn't just advertise good intentions; it sends an invitation." 10 Lincoln Center Plaza

Dakar NOLA New Orleans

The first spoonful of Serigne Mbaye's black-eyed pea soup "tastes like a bridge



The dining room at Tatiana

between Africa and Louisiana," said Ian McNulty in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. That's the intent. The Harlem-born Senegalese-American chef, a 2022 James Beard finalist, routinely steps out of the kitchen to tell diners assembled for his \$150 tasting menu that the soup is called the Last Meal in Senegal because it was fed to enslaved Africans to help sustain them before their long journey across the Atlantic. Mbaye's version features sweet local crabmeat in a roux-like broth, and like everything else about his restaurant, it "speaks to reclaiming, reframing, and opening new possibilities." Dakar NOLA built a following through pop-up appearances before settling into a permanent location late last year. The full tasting menu often includes large head-on shrimp in a "darkly tangy" tamarind sauce, fish caught by local

families, and a kettle of jollof rice. Once a week, Mbaye offers a simpler, three-course meal, and he always has time to check in with diners and share his story as well as the meal's. "New Orleans is lucky that journey has taken him here." 3814 Magazine St.

Soulé Chicago

For Bridgette Flagg, there's no place like home, said Louisa Chu in the *Chicago Tribune*. After a half decade serving Creole-inspired soul food in Ukrainian Village at a small storefront that drew Michelin Guide attention and where the line for diners often lasted hours, Flagg has opened a beautiful restaurant in North Lawndale, the neighborhood where she grew up. Given that her handsome new brick building is surrounded by desolate lots, the move is a gamble. But Flagg got her start selling fried catfish dinners out of her childhood home, and there's every reason to believe her fresh fillets in a delicate cornmeal crust will continue to draw crowds. Flagg's "phenomenal" fried chicken, best with dirty rice and greens, has also made the move. Don't miss the fried green tomatoes, topped with a "spice-forward" remoulade, and try to save room for a banana pudding or peach cobbler. You can accompany every meal with a Soulé punch, made with or without vodka. The secret ingredient? Kool-Aid. 3615 W. Roosevelt Road

Recipe of the week

Meet your new favorite corn muffin, said Andrea Geary in *Cook's Illustrated*. In our test kitchen, we aimed to create a perfectly moist savory muffin and arrived at the ratios here. We "drastically" reduced the sugar found in most recipes, used both milk and sour cream, and precooked some of the cornmeal in the microwave to boost moisture content. We used Quaker yellow cornmeal, but any similar yellow cornmeal will do.

Small-batch savory corn muffins (makes 6)

1 cup cornmeal, divided • ½ cup all-purpose flour • ¾ tsp baking powder • ½ tsp baking soda • ½ tsp table salt • ¾ cup whole milk • 4 tbsp unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces and softened • ⅓ cup sour cream • 1 large egg, beaten • 1½ tbsp sugar

- Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 425. Grease a 6-cup muffin tin. Whisk ¾ cup cornmeal, flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in a medium bowl.
- Whisk together milk and remaining ¼ cup cornmeal in a large bowl. Microwave mixture for 1½ minutes. Whisk thoroughly and continue to microwave, whisking every 30 seconds, until thickened to batter-like consistency, 1 to 2 minutes longer. Add butter and whisk until melted.



- Whisk in sour cream, egg, and sugar until combined. Stir in flour mixture until thoroughly combined. Using portion scoop or large spoon, divide batter evenly among prepared muffin cups.
- Bake until tops are golden brown and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 13 to 15 minutes, rotating muffin tin halfway through baking. Let muffins cool in tin on wire rack for 5 minutes, then remove them from tin and let cool 5 minutes longer. Serve warm.

Wine: Kabinett rieslings

"Climate change has not been friendly to kabinett," said Eric Asimov in *The New York Times*. Germany's kabinett rieslings once were barely sweet and wonderfully refreshing, but a warming climate rendered recent vintages sweeter and richer. A cool and wet 2021 made farming difficult, but the wines made that year are throwbacks, with a welcome delicacy and grace.

2021 Meulenhof Erdener Treppchen (\$24). "Not quite so fragile as a classic kabinett," this "fruity, lightly sweet" riesling from Mosel is still a move in the right direction.

2021 A.J. Adam Dhroner Hofberg (\$27). This softly sweet Mosel kabinett is subtle, delivering "quiet satisfaction."

2021 Kruger-Rumpf Münsterer im Pitterberg (\$28). "An ideal kabinett," this wine from the Nahe region is "gorgeously mineral" and heavy on apricot, but with an "almost unnoticeable" sweetness.



The 2023 Lexus RZ450e: What the critics say

Car and Driver

The first fully electric Lexus to reach the U.S. turns out to be “a good Lexus, but a just-OK EV.” The 308-hp, all-wheel-drive luxury crossover “offers plenty to like,” including a smooth ride and “typically impressive Lexus build quality.” But the RZ450e travels only 220 miles per charge at best, and the speed at which it charges is underwhelming, too. If Lexus and parent company Toyota want to remain competitive, “both will have to try harder.”

Road & Track

Yes, the driving range of this crossover is disappointing, but “that’s the sole major

drawback.” The RZ’s modestly sized battery pack makes it relatively light and efficient. In keeping with Lexus tradition, it’s also “comfortable, quiet, easy to drive, and well-made.” Acceleration is impressively smooth, eschewing “the sudden wallop of torque that other EVs have made a calling card,” and the interior design is characteristically understated. “If the Tesla Model Y is too weird for you,” this comparably sized EV “might be perfect.”

Consumer Reports

Despite the quiet cabin, the responsive handling, and the zippy acceleration, “we still came away feeling let down.” A driving



A battery-powered Lexus, from \$59,650

range of 220 miles—or 196 on 20-inch tires—“simply isn’t acceptable anymore.” Lexus has a reputation for reliability, but if you’re open to other brands, “even the non-luxury Hyundai Ioniq 5 and Kia EV6 seem like smarter choices.”

The best of...flowers everywhere

Ruggable Blossom Multicolor Doormat

“Every home needs a welcoming doormat,” and this one nods to seasonal change with a “gorgeous, vibrant” print. Ruggable’s mats are made of heavy-duty bristle. They’re also machine-washable and printed with ink that resists fading.

\$149, [ruggable.com](https://www.ruggable.com)
Source: USA Today



KBSPets Cherry Blossom Cat Tree

Even an indoor feline can embrace

the advent of spring with this “stunning” perch shaped like a cherry blossom tree. Not just a concession to a cat’s needs, it “beautifies your home.”

\$276, [etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com)
Source: Dwell.com

Nasturtium Meadow Wallpaper

This “bright, whimsical” wallpaper “has captured the design-world imagination.” As any flower pattern would, it enlivens a room. What’s special is its airiness, creating “a breezy, natural look” that will never grow dated.

\$225, [lakeaugust.com](https://www.lakeaugust.com)
Source: Elle Décor



A Fresh Hellebore Bouquet

“The best Easter gift is a flower you’ve never heard of.” The hellebore, or Lenten rose, is a beautiful perennial that’s great as a potted plant, with blossoms that fade instead of falling. The retailer Terrain sells hellebore bouquets.

\$98, [terrain.com](https://www.terrain.com)
Source: Wall Street Journal

Mark D. Sikes Lamp and Shade

Designer Mark Sikes is delivering “pattern-on-pattern glory at its most chic.”

This lampshade and ceramic base, which are sold separately, are a tip of the hat to mid-century decorator Billy Baldwin.

\$446, [anthropologie.com](https://www.anthropologie.com)
Source: Garden and Gun



Tip of the week...

How to color Easter eggs naturally

■ **Gather the ingredients.** Dyes made from common food items can transform a batch of white eggs into a rainbow of colors. Four cups of chopped beets will make a quart of dye for pink eggs. Four cups of yellow onion skins make a quart of orange dye. You get gold or yellow from 3 tbsp of turmeric. Red cabbage, surprisingly, turns eggs blue.

■ **Brew the dyes.** Bring 1 qt water, 2 tbsp white vinegar, and the coloring agent to a boil, simmer for 30 minutes, then strain. For vibrant colors, boil the eggs in the dyes. For paler hues, boil the eggs separately and soak them for 30 minutes in the cooled dyes, rotating the eggs frequently. The longer the eggs sit, the deeper the coloration.

■ **Experiment.** Blueberries, paprika, and fresh spinach leaves can be used as coloring agents, too. For an easy purple, soak eggs in red wine.

Sources: Martha Stewart Living and Good Housekeeping

And for those who have everything...

Adults who toss and turn all night might want to bring home a **Warmie**. As studies have shown, the act of hugging even a pillow lowers stress hormones and quiets the mind. But Warmies are especially soothing. The weighted stuffed animals contain dried millet with French lavender, and if you briefly pop yours in a microwave, it’ll stay warm for two hours. There are 101 cuddle buddies to choose from, including puppies, a goose, and the sloth shown here. “Whichever you choose, you might end up with only a piece of cute décor. But you might reintroduce a bit of joy and comfort to your nightly routine.”

\$30, [warmies.com](https://www.warmies.com)
Source: Wirecutter



Best apps...

For improving your golf game

■ **GolfLogix** is a leader in GPS golf apps, because it’s highly detailed, easy to use, and very accurate. The \$13-a-month app has 35,000 courses mapped, gives distances to any point on a hole, and shows slope contours. You can also adjust the pin position on the map of the green. And the app stores plenty of stats for post-round self-analysis.

■ **Bushnell Golf** offers many of the same features: yardages, scorecards, statistics, 3D maps of 38,000 courses worldwide. But it’s also free. ■ **Hole 19** is popular with smartwatch users because it can send yardage data straight to your Apple Watch or Android Wear. The free app has more than 43,000 courses mapped.

■ **Golfshot** allows for shot tracking on Apple and Android smartwatches. The watch will sense when you swing, then measure and log the distance between swings. This GPS app can use your phone’s camera to identify yardages to unmapped targets and hazards.

Sources: Golf Monthly and Golf.com

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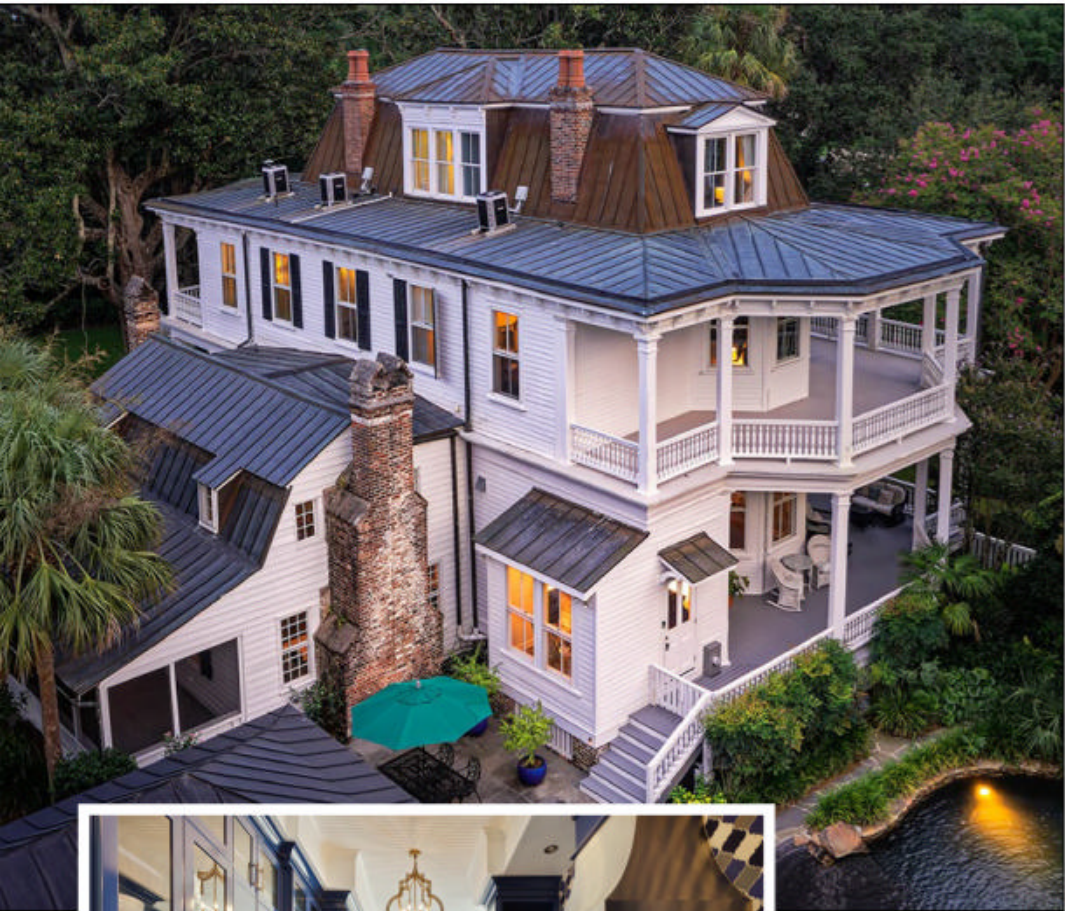
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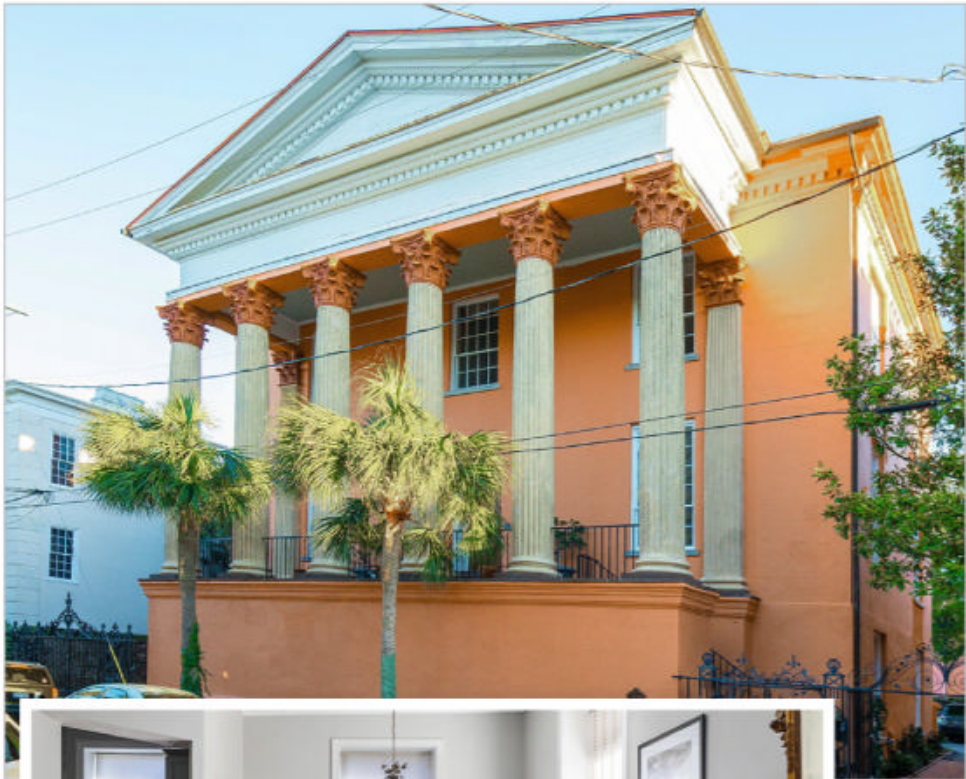
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This week: Homes in Charleston, S.C.



▲ **James Island** The Stiles-Hinson House, on the National Register of Historic Places, was built circa 1742, with a three-story addition in 1891. The five-bedroom home features period details, like the 18th-century bell-cast roof and two Victorian curved piazzas; a grand staircase; formal living and dining rooms; and a new chef's kitchen. The landscaped property has a pool with waterfall, pool house, reflecting pond, outdoor kitchen with wood-burning pizza oven, and clay tennis court; downtown is a short drive. \$3,400,000. John Huguley III, Daniel Ravenel Sotheby's International Realty, (843) 532-8130

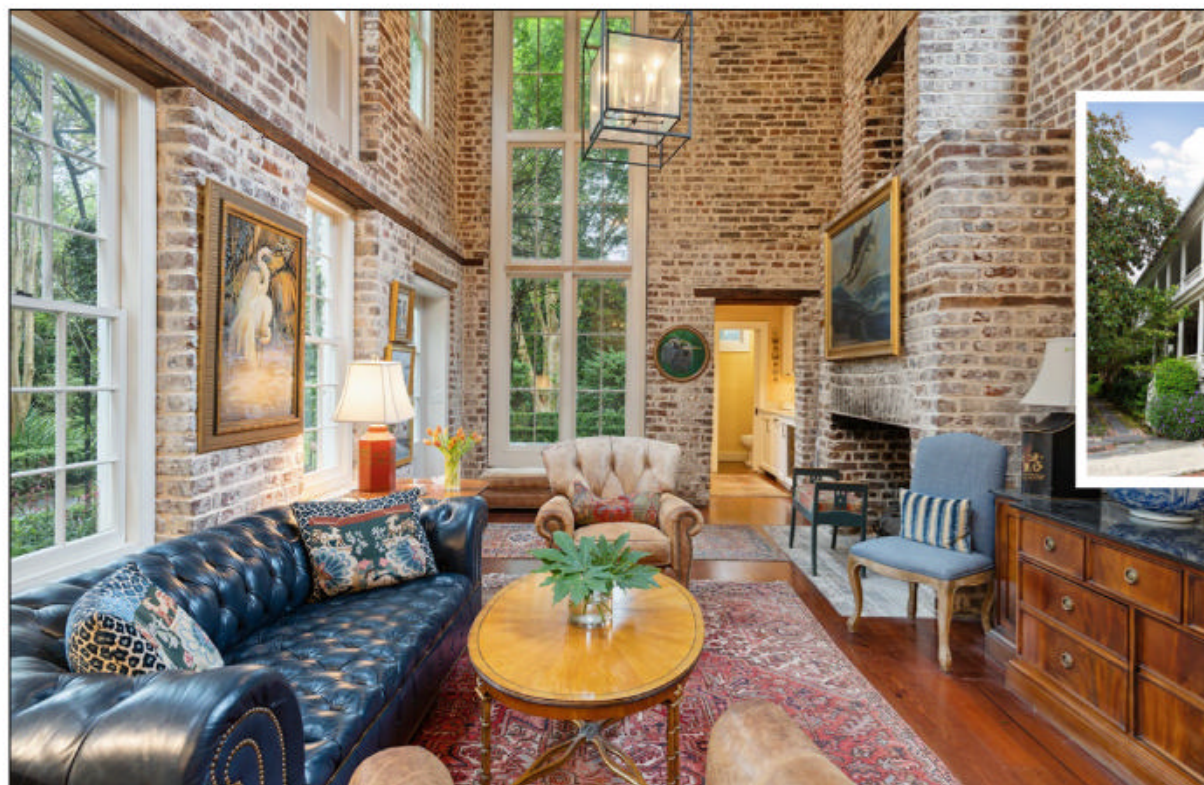


▲ **Ansonborough** The High School of Charleston, an 1842 Edward Brickell White Greek Revival, was converted in the 1980s to four condominium apartments. This three-bedroom, two-story unit comes with 13-foot ceilings, original heart-pine flooring, floor-to-ceiling windows, and a private balcony; rooms include a foyer, library, living-dining room with fireplace, two new baths, and a gourmet kitchen with induction oven, quartz counters, and breakfast area. Included are two off-street parking spots, and the waterfront and several parks are nearby. \$1,695,000. Lois Lane, Lois Lane Properties, (843) 270-2797



▲ **South of Broad** Built as a vocational school in 1923, this Neoclassical Revival near Colonial Lake now holds 27 apartments. The two-bedroom garden-level unit overlooking the leafy courtyard has 9-foot ceilings, oversize windows, crown moldings, built-ins, gas log fireplace, primary suite with garden-view sitting room/office, modern kitchen, and open living and dining room, and comes with a parking space. The lake, Battery, and Horse Lot park are walking distance. \$1,700,000. Leslie Turner, Maison Real Estate, (843) 367-3722

Ellis Creek Photography



◀ **South of Broad**
The Thomas Ball House is a 1775 Charleston Single steps from White Point Garden and the waterfront. The four-bedroom home features historic heart-of-pine floors, moldings, plaster

mantels, and transom windows, a modern chef's kitchen, and a fanned staircase down to the kitchen house, now a sitting room with 20-foot ceilings, the original cooking and laundry fireplaces, and a wet bar. Outside are porches, piazzas, and a landscaped garden. \$4,700,000. Angel Wilson, Daniel Ravenel Sotheby's International Realty, (843) 817-8693



▶ **French Quarter** City House Charleston, a 21-unit complex to be completed next year, combines modern design with elements from the site's original 1942 art deco building. This two-bedroom apartment has 9-foot ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows, a marble gas fireplace, and two terraces, off the living room and main bedroom. Building amenities include parking, a rooftop infinity pool, concierge, and lounge; Waterfront Park, shops, and restaurants are walking distance. \$1,831,000. Butler Derrick, Carriage Properties/Luxury Portfolio International, (843) 714-4054



Images are virtual renderings of the unit

Steal of the week



◀ **Shadowmoss Plantation** This recently renovated three-bedroom home is in the Shadowmoss Plantation community, about 20 minutes from downtown. The open-plan house includes new floor-

ing and tiling; a kitchen with stainless appliances, quartz counters, and eat-in peninsula with shiplap details; a primary suite with a walk-in closet; and an attached in-law suite with a private entrance. Outside are a deck, a screened porch, mature trees, and landscaped front and back yards; the community offers a pool, a golf course, and tennis courts. \$469,000. Jordan Fulcoly, Three Real Estate, (631) 241-5837

The news at a glance

The bottom line

■ Apple and Microsoft alone now account for 13.3 percent of the S&P 500, the highest level on record. Not since IBM and AT&T in 1978 have two stocks made up a greater share of the benchmark. *The Wall Street Journal*

■ The United States is now the biggest supplier of crude oil to the European Union, providing 18 percent of the bloc's crude imports. Russia, accounted for as much as 31 percent of EU oil imports until the end of January 2022. *CNN.com*



■ BioNTech, the German biotech company, said this week that revenues from Covid vaccines it produces with Pfizer would drop to about \$5.4 billion in 2023, from more than \$17 billion in 2022 and close to \$19 billion in 2021. The revenue decline tracks the drop in demand for Covid vaccines to 1.6 billion doses this year, compared with 5.7 billion in 2021. *Financial Times*

■ Deposits at U.S. banks outside the largest 25 fell by \$108 billion in the week ending March 15, following the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank. *Axios*

■ Crocs' sales rose 61 percent in the past three months, bringing its total sales up 200 percent since 2019. Its stock has grown 167 percent since January 2020. *The New York Times*

■ The number of virtual brands, or delivery businesses without a physical storefront, listed on Uber Eats has risen to more than 40,000 this year from over 10,000 in 2021. Uber said this week it plans to cull 5,000 that sell identical dishes under different names. *The Wall Street Journal*

Crypto: Regulators go after Binance exchange

Federal regulators want to bar Binance, the world's largest crypto exchange, from U.S. markets, said Zahra Tayeb in *Business Insider*. The Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) sued the crypto giant and its CEO, Changpeng Zhao, this week, saying that the overseas exchange encouraged riskier trades than are generally allowed on U.S. exchanges. Binance, which doesn't have a physical headquarters but has been registered in the Cayman Islands, among other places, did so "while ignoring rules to register under U.S. law." Regulators also allege its compliance efforts were "a sham"—a big concern following the spectacular collapse of rival FTX in November.



Caught in a crypto clampdown

Put simply, it's illegal to run a crypto derivatives exchange in the U.S. without registering it, said Matt Levine in *Bloomberg*. That's the essence of what the CFTC is saying about Binance. Its complaint contains "retail-focused" justifications for bringing down the hammer, such as Binance publicly posting

instructions on how to use VPNs to conceal customers' locations. But "there are no accusations that Binance is stealing customer money, or even taking big risks with it," for a change. The basic fact is that regulators want to rein in crypto, and cutting off "a big international crypto exchange from big U.S. trading firms" is the best "lever" they see "to crack down on it."

Alibaba: China breaks up an online empire

Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba said this week that its \$200 billion corporation would split into six independently run companies, dismantling Jack Ma's empire, said Raffaele Huang and Clarence Leong in *The Wall Street Journal*. Like other Chinese tech giants, Alibaba has struggled amid a "sweeping regulatory clampdown." Each of the six new entities will "have its own CEO reporting to a board of directors." The split comes after Ma, the once outspoken CEO largely shackled by China's campaign to "tame" internet tycoons, was spotted back in mainland China "for the first known time in almost a year."

Bribery: More charges against Bankman-Fried

U.S. prosecutors unveiled a new indictment against Sam Bankman-Fried this week, accusing the disgraced crypto prince of paying \$40 million to bribe Chinese officials, said Luc Cohen and Jonathan Stempel in Reuters. "The new indictment said Bankman-Fried ordered a \$40 million cryptocurrency payment" after accounts belonging to his hedge fund were frozen by Chinese police in 2021. The payment was intended to "persuade Chinese authorities" to unfreeze the accounts, which held more than \$1 billion in cryptocurrency. Bankman-Fried already faces a 13-count indictment linked to the collapse of his crypto exchange, FTX.

Hailing a ride: Lyft founder steps down as CEO

Lyft's co-founders Logan Green and John Zimmer announced this week they are stepping back from their day-to-day roles running the company, said Bryan Pietsch in *The Washington Post*. David Risher, a former retail executive at Amazon, will replace Green as the ride-sharing company's CEO beginning April 17. Both Green and Zimmer will remain on Lyft's board. "Lyft has faltered in recent months, especially in comparison with market leader Uber." Its shares are down 87 percent from its IPO price in 2019, and the company has yet to turn a profit.

Diminished: Musk values Twitter at \$20 billion

Elon Musk said Twitter is now worth about \$20 billion, less than half of what he paid for it in October, said Kate Conger and Ryan Mac in *The New York Times*. The revelation came last week in an email to employees announcing a new stock-compensation program. Employees will be granted Twitter shares that will vest in six months, with the ability to sell some after one year. Musk said that the social media company "remained in a precarious financial position" following advertising losses, layoffs, and resignations.

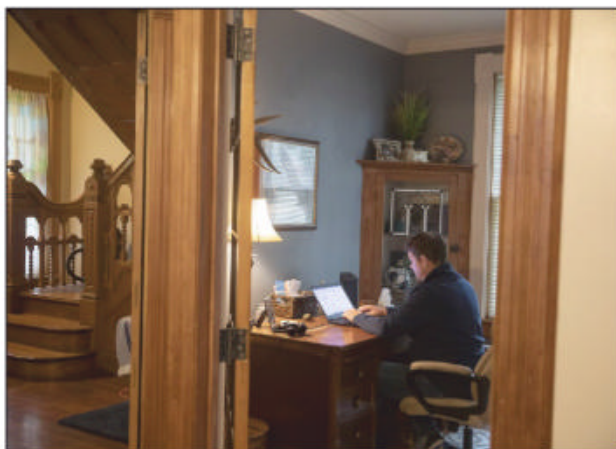
Get ready for a Blockbuster sequel

Is Blockbuster planning a comeback? asked Stuart Heritage in *The Guardian*. Nostalgic cinephiles were abuzz last week when the website for "the long-dormant obsolete VHS rental chain twitched back into life," displaying only the words "We are working on rewinding your movie." It's not clear what Blockbuster has planned. "If Blockbuster exists in any form now, it's as a punch line, a reference to anything too bloated and arrogant to notice the looming shadow of imminent catastrophe." Still, it has its fans. The last Blockbuster-branch in operation globally exists "primarily as a tourist attraction" in Bend, Ore. Last year, Blockbuster's owner, Dish, filed a trademark application for a new logo. That turned out to be a "marketing tie-in" for a Netflix sitcom. But with streamers "hurling money away in a desperate bid for new subscribers," maybe this time something bigger is brewing.

Productivity: Working, or playing golf?

Has the American worker gone soft? asked **Steven Rattner** in *The New York Times*. “Until Covid, most employed Americans had workdays that followed a decades-old pattern: Wake up, shower, breakfast, commute, spend at least eight hours in an office or factory, commute home.” Today’s generation of remote and hybrid workers are rejecting the demands of this routine. “I’ll concede that technology, particularly videoconferencing, has made remote work more feasible.” And yes, eliminating the commute is a great time-saver. Nonetheless, employers are growing skeptical “that their staff members work as hard from home.” America’s prosperity, owed in large part to our collective work ethic, “should allow for more leisure.” However, let’s not kid ourselves: Less output “eventually means a lower standard of living.”

Even tech companies like Meta and Salesforce are running out of patience with their remote employees, said **Callum Borchers** in *The Wall Street Journal*. Lonely bosses in the office are pointing to souring output data suggesting “at-home productivity is falling to unaffordable levels.” About 12 percent of the job listings on LinkedIn are for remote positions, down from 20 percent last March. However, “postings for independent-contractor roles are growing four times as fast as full-time openings,” indicating how much workers still value their flexibility. Erstwhile workaholics



Bosses gripe about work-from-home output.

are embracing “the afternoon-fun economy,” said **Emma Goldberg** in *The New York Times*. A new study from Stanford University found that there were 278 percent more people playing golf at 4 p.m. on a Wednesday in August 2022 than in August 2019. According to ClassPass, “the most popular time for people to schedule a salon or spa treatment last year was noon; in 2019, it was 6 p.m.” Workers with laptops and smartphones are fusing business with pleasure or “pushing back their professional responsibilities into the evening.”

At some of the big tech companies, many employees may have no professional responsibilities, said **Grace Kay** in *Business Insider*. Because of intense competition for tech workers, companies like Meta and Google made a practice of hiring staffers yet giving them “nothing to do.” At Meta, Britney Levy was hired, told “not to work,” then laid off after a few months. Meta was “hoarding us like Pokémon cards,” said Levy. Levy is far from alone, said **Hasan Chowdhury**, also in *Business Insider*. Venture capitalist Keith Rabois alleged recently that “thousands of tech staffers” at Meta and Google were hired to do “fake work.” The tech giants “intentionally overhired engineers and tech talent to stop them from” going to the competition. It meant many employees were brought in to “sit at their desks and do nothing.” No wonder their productivity was low.

What the experts say

Buying a home in the layoff era

Contingencies are back in the homebuying process, said **Veronica Dagher** in *The Wall Street Journal*. During the housing-market frenzy of 2020 through 2022, many buyers felt pressured to waive standard contingencies like financing and even home inspections “to compete with those making cash offers.” Now, though, “53 percent of real-estate agents report an increase in contingencies.” Among the more popular provisions getting added is an employment contingency, which hasn’t been this popular since the 2008 financial crisis. In general, employment contingencies are written into the offer to state that if buyers lose their job before the closing, “they can back out of the deal” without losing their deposit.

Dorsey’s Cash App under fire

Shares of Twitter founder Jack Dorsey’s payment app Block, formerly known as Square, plunged last week after an influential short seller said the company “highly” inflates its user base, said **Rohan Goswami** and **MacKenzie Sigalos** in *CNBC.com*. A two-year investigation by Hindenburg Research revealed last week how Block’s money-sharing platform, Cash App, “thrived on serving ‘unbanked’ customers” and enabled fraud to

“run rampant.” The short seller easily opened accounts in the names of former President Donald Trump and Elon Musk, and received physical “cash cards” in the mail bearing their names. “Former employees estimated that 40 percent to 75 percent of accounts they reviewed were fake.” Many of these fraud accounts received government stimulus payments during the pandemic through Cash App, “with no bank account needed.”

A ‘click-to-cancel’ subscription rule

If you know the frustration of being automatically entered into a costly membership “after trying something for free,” regulators want to make your life easier, said **Michelle Singletary** in *The Washington Post*. The difficulty of canceling free and discount offers led to 17,000 Federal Trade Commission complaints last year. To cut down on “telephone-hell loops,” the FTC is proposing a rule that would require an easy “click to cancel” option on the phone and online. The goal is to avoid more auto-renewal nightmares like that experienced by customers of a learning app called ABCmouse, which paid a \$10 million settlement for sneakily auto-renewing subscriptions—and then refusing to take cancellation requests by phone or email.

Charity of the week



Tornadoes that ripped through Mississippi last week and killed 26 people have left devastation in their wake, largely destroying the town of Rolling Fork. **United Way of Northwest Mississippi (unitedwayvicksburg.org)** is coordinating relief for survivors, who need both urgent support with water and emergency cash and long-term help rebuilding their lives. United Way NWM is a largely volunteer-driven organization with 70 years of experience in the area. Based about an hour away from Rolling Fork, the organization is making a commitment to extended recovery. If you donate online and write “Rolling Fork” in the donation notes, 100 percent of the funds will be used specifically for the tornado relief effort.

Each charity we feature has earned a four-star overall rating from Charity Navigator, which rates not-for-profit organizations on the strength of their finances, their governance practices, and the transparency of their operations. Four stars is the group’s highest rating.

Media: Does TikTok have a future in the U.S.?

Not since Prohibition made alcohol sales illegal have Americans talked about banning a product used by as many Americans as TikTok, said **Shira Ovide** in *The Washington Post*. Washington is worried about the ubiquitous short-video app's ties to China. And indeed, experts agree it's conceivable that "TikTok and other Chinese technology companies could be Trojan horses for the Chinese Communist Party to harvest data on Americans or spew propaganda." Lawmakers have been making that case for years. But in all that time they have yet to produce "specific evidence of harm." Maybe there is "classified information on the threat of Chinese technology," but the American people need a better answer than "Trust us, TikTok is bad."



TikTok's Chew: Lackluster testimony

Nobody came out looking good last week when Congress hauled in TikTok's CEO, Shou Zi Chew, for questioning, said **Kyle Chayka** in *The New Yorker*. "The proceedings, like Mark Zuckerberg's Senate hearings in 2018 around the Cambridge Analytica scandal," created "a rare occasion for bipartisan unity." The antagonism toward TikTok's China ties was evident, but House members, often sounding very shaky on tech details, also tried "to cast the company as a scapegoat for the sins" of all social media companies and their algorithms. Videos mocking the lawmakers drew millions of views—where else?—on TikTok. At the same time, Chew struggled to convince committee members that TikTok could be protected from Chinese influence. "His boilerplate commentary gave the impression that his bosses at ByteDance had forbidden him from saying anything of much substance."

However many users it has, there just aren't "downsides" to the country in a TikTok ban, said **Noah Smith** in his Substack blog, *Noahpinion*. "China banned Google and Facebook and any number of U.S. apps and platforms," and it compels U.S. companies to "toe the CCP line on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, or any other issue the Chinese government cares about." The U.S. has "wielded no such 'sharp power' against China," clinging to its principles on globalization. But it's not clear what America has "derived from this arrangement other than a feeling of self-righteousness." The internet didn't

end up liberalizing China, it just ended up making U.S. citizens "more subject to the diktats of foreign authorities." TikTok, specifically, has had "four years to save itself," said **Tim Culpan** in *Bloomberg*. The Trump administration first floated the idea of a ban in 2019. That TikTok executives "did not shift the needle on public opinion, especially among policymakers, is a major failing." If TikTok gets barred from the U.S., it's deserving of its fate.

Maybe the U.S. can justify closing down TikTok, but the price is abandoning "the idea that Americans should be allowed to access information from around the world on their own terms," said **Adi Robertson** in *The Verge*. And of course we'd be shutting down the speech of all the American users who've devoted their energy to the platform. We're moving toward a future where we can import nearly anything from China *but* speech. If that sounds familiar, it's because we've decided that "the only way to beat China is to join it."

Yes, AI can replace the average CEO

Zachary Crockett
The Hustle

You've heard automation experts philosophize about how AI is going to replace vast swaths of workers, said **Zachary Crockett**. Here's another idea: "Why not start by replacing the highest-paid employee of them all—the CEO?" Today's average chief executive is paid the equivalent of 399 median workers' salaries, up from 20 to 1 in 1965. Studies show that executives have simultaneously gotten more expensive while becoming less effective over time. Automating the CEO wouldn't just be cheaper, it might actually improve the company's performance. McKinsey, the consulting company beloved by ruthless CEOs, estimates "that roughly 25 percent of a CEO's time

is spent on tasks that machines could replicate," like reviewing financial performance and forecasting trends. CEOs are "heralded as decision-making geniuses," but firms like IBM and Google already rely quietly on AI, much as football coaches use data and analytics to determine what plays to run. Some companies are going further. Last August, a Hong Kong-based online gaming firm called NetDragon Websoft appointed a virtual robot powered by artificial intelligence as its CEO. "She worked 24/7, didn't sleep, and was compensated \$0 per year." And so far, Netdragon's shares have beaten the Hong Kong stock market—the CEO's ultimate performance metric.

How China pushes off every crisis

Zhiwu Chen
The New York Times

"Remember the Evergrande crisis?" asked **Zhiwu Chen**. It was a little more than a year ago that Evergrande, China's largest property developer, "was about to collapse under more than \$300 billion in debt." Hundreds of apartment towers sat empty or unfinished. "China, it was said, faced its Lehman Brothers moment," inciting warnings of "a catastrophic default" that could set off a global depression. Such "predictions of Chinese financial doom" tend to resurface every few years, mostly because Wall Street and the media repeat the "mistake of applying pure market logic to China's economy." It just doesn't work that way. China is still not entirely

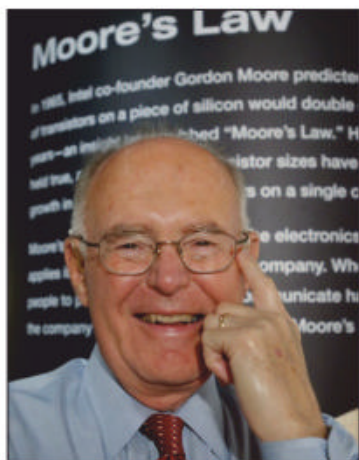
a market economy. Its government has "virtually unlimited power to head off crises by directing resources—and apportioning pain—as it sees fit, often by ordering banks and other creditors to accept losses." That's what happened with Evergrande. Under pressure from Beijing, domestic lenders agreed to loosen up Evergrande's deadlines. A deal to resolve its offshore debt is also imminent. Another crisis averted. This is great for Beijing, which has "zero tolerance for financial distress or major corporate failures that could trigger demonstrations." But these Evergrande-style fixes reward irresponsible behavior. At some point, the doomsayers might be right.

The tech visionary who wrote ‘Moore’s Law’

Gordon Moore
1929–2023

In 1965, Gordon Moore made a prediction: that integrated circuits would grow in complexity and capacity so fast that computer processing power would double every year. These advances would “lead to such wonders as home computers” and “personal portable communications equipment,” he wrote. While he later widened the time frame for doubling to every two years, his prediction of exponential advancement held up and became known as “Moore’s Law.” The law set forth an ethos of growth that made Silicon Valley the global leader of a tech revolution—and nobody did more to make Moore’s vision come true than Moore himself. He was the co-founder of Intel Corp., maker of the first commercial computer microprocessor. Intel’s Pentium silicon semiconductor chips eventually powered more than 80 percent of the world’s desktop computers. The most modest of tech billionaires, Moore was humble about his famous dictum. “I just did a wild extrapolation,” he said in 2015, “and it proved to be amazingly correct.”

Moore grew up in Pescadero, Calif., a farming community where his father was a county sheriff, said *The Washington Post*. The first person in his



family to attend college, he earned a chemistry doctorate from the California Institute of Technology and was recruited by celebrated physicist William Shockley to work at his semiconductor lab near Stanford University. Shockley’s “overbearing management style” eventually led Moore and a few other engineers to start their own firm, Fairchild Semiconductor. That firm, said *The Telegraph* (U.K.), became “an incubator of much of the talent which gave rise to Silicon Valley.” In 1968, Moore and colleague Robert Noyce used \$2.5 million in capital to found Integrated Electronics, later shortening the name to Intel.

They assembled a group of “the boldest and most creative technicians of the high-tech age,” said *The New York Times*. By the 1990s, Intel was “the most successful semiconductor company in history,” earning Moore, as chief executive from 1975 to 1987, a fortune of some \$7 billion. In later years Moore “became a major figure in philanthropy,” but still maintained a preference for “tattered shirts and khakis” and shopping at Costco. He said he just had the good fortune to be “at the right place at the right time” to take part in the transformation of the industry. “It’s been a phenomenal ride,” he said.

The Knicks legend who played through the pain

Willis Reed
1942–2023

Willis Reed became a hero to basketball fans—and won a place in sports history—for his sheer determination. After dominant performances in the first four games of the 1970 NBA Finals, the New York Knicks’ captain tore a muscle along his thigh, and his team lost its next game to the Los Angeles Lakers. Nobody expected him to play the decisive Game 7, but after getting an injection of painkillers, Reed limped out onto the court. Madison Square Garden erupted. “I thought, this is what an earthquake must feel like,” he said. The 6-foot-9 center scored the Knicks’ first two baskets—his only points of that game, but they were enough to inspire his teammates to victory. Reed, who played an injury-limited 10 seasons, all with the Knicks, was brilliant on the court, but he was forever revered for the night he simply suited up. “I didn’t want to be a guy who didn’t come out and show he had the guts and grit to be there,” he said.



Reed was born in the tiny town of Hico, Louisiana, and grew up on his grandparents’ 200-acre

farm in nearby Bernice, said *The New York Times*. In a childhood spent in the Jim Crow South, he attended an all-Black high school, then became a basketball standout at what’s now Grambling State University, a historically Black college. Drafted by the Knicks, Reed quickly established he was not a player to be messed with, said *The Washington Post*. In one 1966 game against L.A., a brawl erupted and “Reed wound up fighting almost the entire Lakers team.”

He was a consummate leader, said the *New York Post*, known as “the Captain” long after his playing days. Reed was named the NBA’s Most Valuable Player in 1970, and was finals MVP when the Knicks won their second championship, in 1973. His No. 19 was the first number retired by the Knicks, and in 2021 he was named one of the NBA’s 75 greatest players. He went on to briefly coach the Knicks and the Creighton University men’s basketball team, then work for several NBA teams. A day rarely passed when he wasn’t reminded of his 1970 Game 7 heroics. “There are times,” Reed said, “when I swear I wake up and I hear the cheers from that night.”

The exuberant singer who helped shape Parliament-Funkadelic

It was hard to miss Fuzzy Haskins on stage. A vocalist and songwriter for Parliament-Funkadelic, the music collective led

Fuzzy Haskins
1941–2023

by George Clinton, Haskins was known for his wild

performances, wearing tight long johns and gyrating against the microphone pole. He started out in the five-member doo-wop group the Parliaments, which soon changed its name to Parliament and created an alter-ego funk band called Funkadelic, blurring genre distinctions and disrupting the pop music scene. Haskins’ bluesy tenor was on display in both groups—by then, he’d been honing his ability to sing with others for decades. “We used to sing church music—hymns, gospel—at home,” he said. “We’d harmonize.”

Born in Elkhorn, W.Va., Clarence Haskins grew up with a coal-miner father and a homemaker mother. The family moved to New Jersey, where Haskins met Clinton in his final year of high school. Clinton’s teen vocal group had just lost a member, and Haskins quickly integrated into the band. As Parliament, the group was “vocally oriented,” said *The New York Times*, and as Funkadelic, the same performers drew on funk and psychedelic rock to create a new sound.

After clashing with Clinton, Haskins left the band for a solo career in the 1970s, releasing two albums. He reunited for a Funkadelic reboot with two of his old bandmates (though not Clinton) in the ‘80s, and they toured again in the late ‘90s as Original P. He’d later “find a new path as a preacher,” said *Spin*, recording some of the gospel songs of his youth. Music had a spiritual connection for him. “Once you reach a goal with your music,” he said, “it sort of opens you up.”

A cathedral worthy of the prairie

My uncle set out to construct a round barn, said Hailey Branson-Potts in the Los Angeles Times. He's ended up building a work of art—and so much more.

LOGAN COUNTY, OKLA.
A curiosity rises amid the wheat fields along rural Highway 33, which cuts through the town of Guthrie.

It's an immense, circular building—about 15,000 square feet inside—with a domed roof topped by an ornate cupola and a copper eagle. Standing at 72 feet, it is visible for miles on the flat Oklahoma expanse.

Jay Branson is building it in his backyard. He calls it his round barn, but it's more of a prairie cathedral. He has been working on it for seven years. As he builds, strangers come. They pull off the highway, haul up his long driveway, and stare.

Some, overcome by the beauty, have wept upon seeing the inside of the dome, with its ascending rings of interlocking diamonds and octagons that Jay cut by hand from poplar wood. At the top is an oculus, a round opening in the roof, like in the Pantheon in Rome. When sunlight streams in, the effect is downright heavenly.

My great-uncle is 59. He's plain-spoken and self-deprecating, as we Bransons tend to be. He would never admit it, but he is an artist. Compliment his work, and Jay, ever the stoic, will usually respond: "It is what it is."

AS A YOUNG man in the 1980s, Jay, a farm boy with a golden tan and muscles chiseled from hay baling and house building, went to Washington to visit a friend.

Inside the U.S. Capitol, Jay craned his neck up, gobsmacked by the dome, wishing he could build one someday.

"There's nobody in Oklahoma that's gonna hire my dumb ass to come out and build a round roof," he remembers thinking. "If you went to the bank to build a round dome, they'd laugh you out of the bank. If it's not a square box, they don't want to lend you money. I knew my chances of being able to do this would be probably slim to nothing."

Jay grew up on my great-grandparents' farm outside the tiny farm town of Marshall, Okla., population 200 or so, where my family—both my dad's side and my mom's side—go back generations. In its heyday, it was a proud place nicknamed Prairie City, with a Main Street nearly as wide as a football field—big enough for



The interlocking octagons and diamonds of Jay Branson's barn turn it into a prairie Pantheon.

a team of horses and its legendary high school marching band to make a U-turn.

There's not much left of the place now. Its only school closed, and its downtown buildings were boarded up long ago. It's the epitome of rural Flyover Country, too often dismissed and caricatured by outsiders. But struggling though it may be, there's beauty—and brilliance—there.

My great-grandparents raised eight kids in Marshall. My grandpa, Jerald "Butch" Branson, was the oldest. Jay, 18 years his junior, was the second-youngest. They were poor. And they worked hard.

At 13, Jay got his first summer construction job, hauling bricks and mixing mortar for a crew building a church parsonage just over the county line. It was backbreaking work, the weather "hotter than blue blazes," Jay said.

"I'd hauled hay as a kid, but there was no comparison," he said. "That's kind of when I decided: You know, I've got to either get smart" about what kind of jobs he took on, "or I'm going to be an old man when I'm 20 years old."

My dad remembers a teenage Jay, mop of curly brown hair and a bone-dry sense of

humor, bodybuilding on dirt roads, with a rope harness strapped to his body, pulling an old Jeep like a horse pulling a buggy.

Just out of high school, Jay went to work for his older brother John, who had been doing handyman and remodeling work but wanted to strike out on his own. Using a *Reader's Digest* do-it-yourself manual, the Branson boys taught themselves how to frame walls and construct buildings. Their work was steady, and eventually Jay struck out on his own, too. He built houses and businesses and my childhood playhouse, with its own set of monkey bars. He had his own successful construction company and employees.

As he admits, he's "considered an eccentric," prone to getting bored with "building a box over and over."

On a lark, he studied water pH levels and filtration systems and started building waterfalls from native Oklahoma sandstone, for homes and a municipal park. At one point, Jay bought a concession truck, made a custom kitchen for it, and started selling cinnamon rolls from a recipe that he ginned up as a teenager, "sitting at home one night in Marshall, that little house, bored off my gourd."

He called his food truck Sleeping Dog Cinnamon Rolls. It was some of his favorite work, selling desserts at bluegrass and watermelon festivals with his brother John, who battled Parkinson's disease and was buried last year in his plain white work T-shirt. But cinnamon rolls didn't pay the bills. Jay sold the wagon and kept building houses. "That dang money always gets in your way," he said. "It is what it is."

EVENTUALLY, JAY BUILT himself a squat adobe house a 25-minute drive from Marshall and built a happy life there with his new wife, Julie, her two little girls, and their infant daughter.

Then Julie, a beloved third-grade teacher, started getting sick. She had scleroderma, a cruel autoimmune disease that hardens the skin and internal organs. Jay bought a 45-foot-long motor home that they drove to visit her family out of state. He fixed it up with nice furniture, wanting her to be comfortable.

Julie died in 2016. She was 48. Her daughters put pictures of her all over the house, smiling with those big brown eyes. "I'd get up out of the bed that we'd just slept in and go into the closet to get ready for something. There's her clothes and shoes," Jay said. "You go in to brush your teeth, and there's her toothbrush, laying next to yours."

On the weekends, the girls—the youngest just 10—would go see friends and try to keep busy. Jay often was home alone with his grief. To stay sane, he went out to his backyard and started building the barn.

Although not exactly common, round barns have a long history in the U.S. George Washington had a 16-sided barn at his Mount Vernon estate. And what is said to be the country's first truly round barn was built by a Shaker religious community in Massachusetts in the 1820s.

They were efficient for farmers who saved time by walking in a continuous circle to feed their animals, said Dennis Craig, a historic preservation officer at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, which has three historic round barns on campus. Religious folks liked them because, it was said, the devil couldn't hide in the corners. And round barns were touted as being aerodynamic and more suited to the wind in Tornado Alley than square buildings. The famed Arcadia Round Barn on Route 66, built in 1898, is half an hour southeast of Jay's home.

Initially, Jay's was going to be a utilitarian structure, a shop big enough to park his motor home inside and turn it around in. He built it on the weekends and at night,

while still building houses. He began building the walls—using thick, double-insulated foam and rebar blocks that he filled with concrete—in a giant circle. A neighbor suggested turning it into a wedding venue. He began visualizing a dome, obsessing over it as he lay in bed each night.

Jay drew a simple sketch of the interlocking octagons and diamonds that would form the arched ribs of the dome, but he never made a true blueprint. "I just started cutting," he said. "You know, if you figure the circumference of any structure that's round, and divide it into segments, there's a way. You've just got to make it even, get it exactly right, and just start building."

Each piece of wood in the dome is hand-cut, uniquely shaped and curved, each placed at a different angle. Using a piece of aluminum, he built himself a tick stick—a centuries-old measuring tool used by shipbuilders for complex wood cuts.

He worked from a manlift that carried him 65 feet up inside. For the top of the structure, he created a steel tower that sat atop the dome and connected a winch line to it. He strapped on a harness and swung from a cable as he worked on the exterior of the structure.

He used poplar that he purchased green and let age for a few years, as well as pine and cherry wood. For the front awning, he used sassafras, a semi-soft wood that darkens with age, smells like root beer when you cut it, and reminds him of the sassafras tea he drank as a kid.



Visitors have wept on seeing the dome.

JEFF WILLIAMS, A retired Oklahoma State University architecture professor, said it reminds him of the ancient Duomo in Florence, Italy. The cathedral was under construction for more than 140 years; architects puzzled for years over how to build its dome.

Jeff, whose wife is from Marshall, met Jay a few years ago while standing in line for coffee at a Panera Bread, where they were both regulars. "At that point, it was just the

concrete walls," Jeff said. "It was interesting to me, just for the use of the materials. But I wasn't sure whether he was for real or not. The more he shared with me, I thought, 'This is a pretty creative guy.' But then I started seeing this—and it was like, holy cow."

Standing in the barn on a frigid day this winter, wind chill in the teens, Jeff told Jay: "This was your therapy."

A few years ago, Jay got married again. When he met Valerie, whose homemade cookies rival Jay's cinnamon rolls, the barn's plain concrete walls were about 3 feet tall. They now stand at 20 feet—taller than the adobe house.

Valerie has helped Jay plaster the walls and prop up pieces of wood taller than herself, gotten him down when he's gotten stuck on the manlift and dreamed with him about all of the barn's possibilities. "She's been in constant construction since she's been married to me," he said.

"I share him," she said with a laugh. "I share him with that barn out there."

They envision a grand event space. Jay is building a spacious bridal suite and a bar in an add-on around the back, overlooking a wheat field. Valerie is excited to get going on the interior design, the tile and the colors. To get all his state permits to make it an event space, Jay had to hire an architect to draw up formal blueprints for the structure—which had already been built without any. He's nicknamed his barn the Bird's Nest, since we always called him Jay Bird.

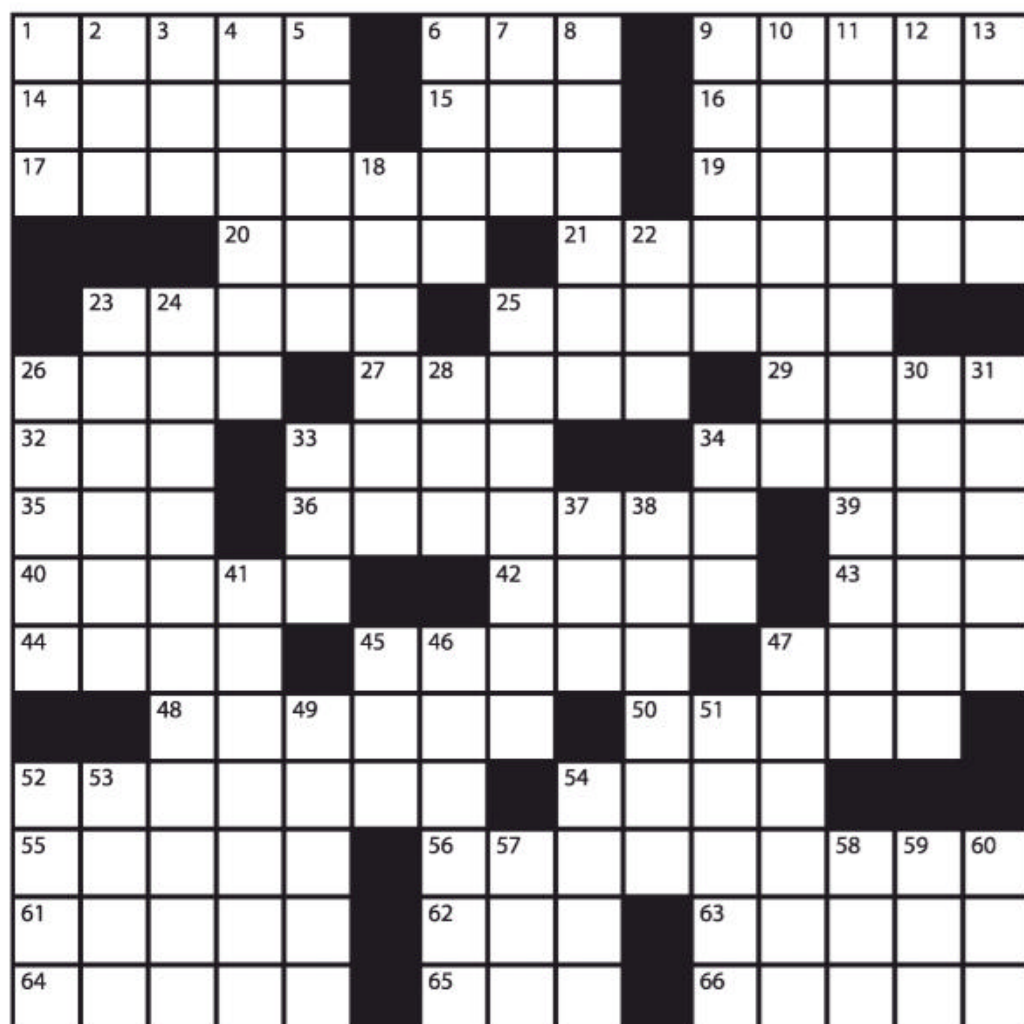
Even as it stands unfinished, so many people have come in off the highway that he finally set out a guest book. The entries are from California, Colorado, South Dakota, and Texas. From all over the Sooner State. There's even one from Canada.

Jay never thought it would take him this long to build the barn.

But five years ago, the prostate cancer that he thought he had beaten years earlier returned. It spread. My strong great-uncle, swinging from the rafters, lost weight. He got tired. It's the same kind of cancer that took his oldest brother, my grandpa Butch. A rugged outdoorsman who made teddy bears in his final days, my grandpa died at age 52, when I was 10.

Jay says he's doing better. He's trying to get the barn done within the year, and he's always out working in the heat, the cold, and the ever-present wind. He doesn't talk about the cancer much. It is what it is.

This story was originally published in the Los Angeles Times. Used with permission.

Crossword No. 690: Fast Food Nations by Matt Gaffney**ACROSS**

- 1 Mercury portrayer of 2018
 6 Sambuca sample
 9 Ethan in *Glass Onion*
 14 Stroll
 15 Fish pond swimmer
 16 Felt that workout later
 17 World leader whose delegation had a huge KFC order delivered to its Moscow hotel during a state visit on March 20
 19 R.L. who writes *Goosebumps* books
 20 Laudatory poetry
 21 "Let's see how your new shirt looks!"
 23 Choose to participate
 25 "Quit acting up!"
 26 German number
 27 Nickels and dimes, say
 29 Vaper's item
 32 Fashionable Anna
 33 Rhames who portrayed Don King
 34 Functionality
 35 100 percent
 36 When this university won the national football title in 2019, President Trump greeted the team at the White House with silver trays of Burger King, Wendy's, and Domino's food
 39 Not to be trusted, casually
 40 Witty Bill
 42 Q5 automaker
 43 Vietnamese celebration
 44 OPEC member

- 45 Cut into small cubes
 47 Besides that
 48 Rick and Robert, for two
 50 Verne who created Captain Nemo
 52 Tree with large leaves
 54 Spelling seen on TV screens
 55 Cuban dance genre
 56 Former Russian leader who did a 1998 ad for Pizza Hut featuring his granddaughter
 61 Dental floss brand
 62 Sheared female
 63 Two after Leo
 64 Grows smaller, as the moon
 65 Crafty
 66 Bar seat

DOWN

- 1 Upper limit, casually
 2 Montreal pal
 3 Fourth after FDR
 4 George known for his 1779-83 defense of Gibraltar
 5 Political theorist Ibram X. ____
 6 Pair usually parallel
 7 Charged particle
 8 Pal of Charlie Brown
 9 "____ mañana"
 10 Players eligible for an NFL game
 11 Sen. Ted Cruz was criticized in 2018 for naming this fast food chain's burgers as his favorite, since his state of Texas has none of its restaurants

- 12 Casino game
 13 Ancient paradise
 18 Crossword solver's preference, often
 22 Hesitating syllables
 23 Of the eye
 24 SNL great who in a 1992 sketch played Bill Clinton taking bites of patrons' food at a McDonald's
 25 Former North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il's personal chef was once dispatched to Beijing to buy him a bag of these
 26 "I couldn't agree more"
 28 It's six before seven
 30 "Sounds about right"
 31 Beau ____ (noble act)
 33 Item with an eject button
 34 College, in German slang
 37 Seek damages from
 38 Far from steady work
 41 Even-tempered
 45 Chip's target
 46 Since way back when
 47 Bring forth, as a reply
 49 Spills a secret
 51 Eurasian mountain range
 52 Bird metaphorically eaten
 53 Surrounding atmosphere
 54 Low heart or club, say
 57 Hooting creature
 58 *The Last of Us* airer
 59 Suffix with ranch
 60 Kilmer in *Top Gun: Maverick*

The Week Contest

This week's question: A recent study concluded that corny "dad jokes" help teach children how to cope with embarrassment. Come up with a term for the beneficial psychological effect of exposure to a pun-loving, shame-proof dad.

Last week's contest: The Great Atlantic Sargassum Belt, a 5,000-mile-wide mass of thick, toxic fume-emitting brown seaweed, is expected to make beachgoing at Florida's Gulf Coast much less pleasant this spring. Come up with a tabloid headline about this foreign assault on the Sunshine State.

THE WINNER: "Kelp Is on the Way!"
Peter Gordon, Great Neck, N.Y.

SECOND PLACE: "This Is Not Recreational Weed!"
Gary Evenson, McFarland, Wis.

THIRD PLACE: "Huge Stinking Mess Envelops Florida (Also, Seaweed)"
Saul Bronstein, Port St. Lucie, Fla.

For runners-up and complete contest rules, please go to theweek.com/contest.

How to enter: Submissions should be emailed to contest@theweek.com. Please include your name, address, and daytime telephone number for verification; this week, type "Dad jokes" in the subject line. Entries are due

by noon, Eastern Time, Tuesday, April 4. Winners will appear on the Puzzle Page next issue and at theweek.com/puzzles on Friday, April 7. In the case of identical or similar entries, the first one received gets credit.



◀ The winner gets a one-year subscription to *The Week*.

Sudoku

Fill in all the boxes so that each row, column, and outlined square includes all the numbers from 1 through 9.

Difficulty: medium

8						4	7	5
	4		7				2	6
		2	6					3
	5	4	2					
				1				
					8	5	3	
2					3	7		
4	8				6		5	
3	1	6						2

Find the solutions to all *The Week's* puzzles online: www.theweek.com/puzzle.

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The Week (ISSN 1533-8304) is published weekly, except January 6, January 13, July 14, and September 15. **The Week** is published by **Future US LLC**, 130 West 42nd Street, 7th floor, New York, NY 10036. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to **The Week**, PO Box 37252, Boone, IA 50037-0252. One-year subscription rates: U.S. \$199; Canada \$229; all other countries \$269 in prepaid U.S. funds. Publications mail agreement No. 40031590, Registration No. 140467846. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 503, RPO West Beaver Creek, Richmond Hill, ON L4B 4R6. **The Week** is a member of The New York Times News Service and The Washington Post/Bloomberg News Service, and subscribes to The Associated Press.

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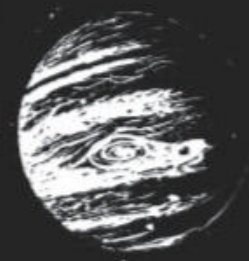
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